

A
Gentleman
Adventurer
~
Keith

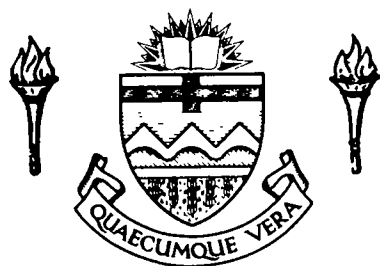
A Gentleman Adventurer

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Marian Keith

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A Gentleman Adventurer

MARIAN KEITH

A Gentleman Adventurer

A STORY OF THE
HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY

BY

Marian Keith

*Author of "The Bells of St. Stephen's," "Little Miss
Melody," "In Orchard Glen," "The Silver Maple,"
"Treasure Valley," etc.*

McCLELLAND AND STEWART
PUBLISHERS :: :: TORONTO

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A GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER
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To the Memory of My Dear Friend,
MR. WILLIAM THOMPSON SMITH,
and

THE MANY HAPPY DAYS WE SPENT TOGETHER
RECALLING HIS EXPERIENCES AS AN OFFICER OF
THE COMPANY OF GENTLEMAN ADVENTURERS:

This Book Is Lovingly Dedicated.

MARIAN KEITH.

London, Ont.

579187

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A GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER

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CHAPTER I

The Guardian Angels

IT was while they sat by the fire alone on that last Sabbath afternoon that the Gentleman Adventurer and his mother said their real farewell. The Gentleman, himself, was very young and desperately afraid of breaking down, so he did not sit long, but wandered restlessly about the dim old drawing-room, turning the pages of the music on the big bow-legged piano, standing to stare up at the picture of his royal relative, Charles Stuart the Young Chevalier, whose name he bore, pulling aside the curtains to look out into the rain-soaked garden, where the tulips held their crimson cups tightly closed. Finally he came back to the fireside and leaned against the high mantel, beneath the picture of his father which he resembled so strikingly, and which hung in the reflected glow of the fire flanked by silver candlesticks. He dared not look at his mother. If he saw a sign of tears he was lost.

She sat in her low chair, outwardly serene. Her full black silk skirts billowed softly around her. Her gentle, wrinkled face, the lace of her cap, and her delicate hands folded in her lap, made the high lights of a beautiful picture, lit by the glow of the fire. But she, too, kept her eyes on the coals, and did not look up at him, for fear the barriers of self-control should be swept away. And, indeed, she did not need to look to see him standing there, tall and straight, with the light reflected from his waving golden hair. Always, when he had been away from her, at school, she could picture him in every detail:

his bonnie head, the gallant way he held it when he walked, the laugh in his blue eyes. Mountains and seas and a waste of wild unknown country would soon divide them, but she would always see him standing beneath his father's portrait with the candlelight on his shining head.

When she spoke at last, being a Scottish woman, her first words were of commonplace things.

"The grey socks, dear; are you sure that Nannie put them in your box?"

He gave a little relieved laugh. "I didn't see her, but I'll wager all the furs of Rupert's Land she did. I expect to make my fortune trading socks to the Indians. Won't it be a disaster if the beggars don't wear any!"

She smiled at this; the atmosphere had lightened a little and she had courage to go on.

"Mary and the children will be here in a few minutes; there is something I should like to say while we are alone."

She paused; the boy looked steadily into the glowing grate and there was no laughter in his eyes. "Yes, Mother?" he whispered.

She folded her hands a little tightly in her lap. "The reason I can let you go, dear, is that I had the promise given me again. When Mary and Alison grew up and left me, and your father was called away, I used to look at you playing beside Nannie in the garden, and think that if the time ever came when I could not put my hand on you that I could not bear it. But the night before you went away to school, you remember, I had the promise given me. And last night it came again." She paused and the boy looked at her now, a little awed.

"It came again last night," she repeated, and she was able to look up at him. "I am not like Nannie," she said, smiling faintly, "afraid of the cold and the Indians and the hardships of the country. But I have been afraid, Charlie; afraid of 'the terror by night, and the destruction that wasteth at noonday.' But the old promise came back to me last night. You remember it?"

Her soft voice had sunk to a whisper, "Say it, dear," she added. And, just as he had said his Golden Text to her every Sunday afternoon of his childhood, he repeated the words he knew she wanted:

"'For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.'"

"That is the reason I can let you go. And the other promise, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him.' It came too."

There was a long silence; the gilt clock under its glass globe on the mantelpiece softly ticked away the minutes.

"You will not forget, Charlie, to give the angels a chance?" she whispered. "You will promise?"

Suddenly the boy was on his knees beside her, his arms around her.

"I promise you, Mother, I promise," he whispered brokenly.

A sound of wheels upon the gravel driveway brought them suddenly back to the seen things.

"Mary and the children," his mother said, rising, serene and smiling.

CHAPTER II

The Lure of the Carriage-and-Six

ALL the long sunny day the Hudson's Bay Company's barque, *Ocean Eagle*, had been running smoothly across the great Bay, a warm breeze from the west swelling her towers of canvas. It was in the early sixties, and already most sailing vessels carried auxiliary engines; but the great Company had never been in haste to adopt new fashions for her wintering partners, and so the *Ocean Eagle* flew before the wind, a beautiful sea-bird, with white pinions outspread.

Up and down the long white breezy deck marched two of the cabin passengers; Scottish lads, just out of school, shipping as apprentice clerks to the Company. The shorter one, with the kind Celtic face, was the son of a St. Andrew's lawyer of some repute, who had planned that his boy should follow in his steps. But though young Archie was a faithful plodder at his studies, he stumbled sadly over examinations; and so he had been transferred to a school where the tests were of a more practical kind. The tall one, who bore the princely name of Charles Stuart, and looked like a young prince, had lost his father in childhood. He, too, had been interrupted in his studies; but it was a penurious uncle that had put an end to his university life; and an independent spirit and a love of adventure had sent him out to make his fortune in the wilderness.

So far, there had been little enough adventure, and the young gentlemen's pockets were empty except for the thick folds of the indenture that bound them to serve the Company, and it scarcely suggested wealth. It stated that Archibald Hamilton Sinclair and Charles Edward

Stuart of the city of St. Andrew's, in the County of Fife, Scotland, promised to serve the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company "with courage and fidelity" for a term of five years, their remuneration being the sum of twenty pounds for the first year, twenty-five pounds for the second year, and so on till, in the fifth year, they would receive the magnificent salary of fifty pounds. The arrangements regarding food and lodging were not so definite. Young gentlemen adventurers were supposed to provide their own clothing and all the expenses of the journey except their actual passage money, and to get their living somehow in the wilderness, where, they firmly believed, one could bring down a bear or a buffalo at any moment, and where wild fowl and venison were common fare.

It was no very generous bargain the Company drove with its servants; but, as young Stuart's frugal uncle explained to them many times, they must consider the great honour of being officers in such a Company, and look upon the service as being a school where they would receive a liberal education without paying fees.

Sometimes, sitting in their stateroom on stormy nights, the two boys would take out their formidable-looking indentures and study them with some misgivings. Then, when Harry Erskine, a young native of the Red River, who was returning home from Edinburgh University, would point out that the contract was all in favour of the Company, they would sweep away all doubts by reference to Johnny McBain. Johnny was a St. Andrew's boy who had been in the employ of the Company for two years only, and was already a wealthy man—drove his own carriage-and-six, he had told them in his last letter.

Young Erskine shrugged at this, an expressive Red River shrug.

"Where is this nabob stationed?" he enquired.

"At York Factory."

"An apprentice clerk, at York Factory, with a carriage and . . ." Then the young man from Rupert's Land leaned back and laughed, a silent, shaking laugh, in-

herited from a Cree ancestor. But Cree-like he was stolidly non-committal on the reason of his mirth.

This was a bit disconcerting. Johnny McBain's carriage-and-six was their beacon light, their bulwark, their solace in moments of doubt and homesickness.

"Well," declared Charles Stuart, who troubled his gay head not at all about what lay before him, "if Johnny McBain can drive a carriage-and-six of his own after two years, I'm going to have an ivory chariot drawn by a herd of buffalo in a few months!"

The two young apprentice clerks, marching the deck, paused before a little group seated in a sheltered corner.

It was very rarely that the Hudson's Bay ships carried women, but on this voyage there were two ladies to offset the two hundred men making up the crew and passengers. The elder woman was the wife of a missionary stationed at York Factory, returning to her home after a year's visit with relatives in Liverpool. Under her care was a young lady, a daughter of one of the Company's chief factors, who, after a year in an Edinburgh school, was going back to her native land.

Mrs. Allingham smiled a welcome, her knitting needles flashing in the sunshine.

"Ah, the Young Chevalier and his faithful henchman! Come away and share our cosy corner. This is the first time I have been really warm since we sighted Greenland's Icy Mountains. If the good Lord brings me safely to my own hearthstone again, there will be such a fire kindled at York as will light a beacon as far as the Straits!"

She laughed gaily. Hardship and cold she had known intimately for twenty years but though they had wrinkled her face and bent her body, her spirit was as young and strong as the day she first sailed, a bride, through the roaring ice-guarded straits of Hudson's Bay.

"If we sail into ice this year," declared the Young Chevalier, curling up his long limbs at her feet, "we'll set fire to the gunpowder magazine rather than have you cold!"

"Where have you and Mrs. Allingham been hiding all morning, Miss Cameron?" asked Archie Sinclair, who was a sort of lover at large and paid court to all women.

Marie Rose Cameron had the Rupert's Land custom of speaking more eloquently by sign than by word. Her father was a Highland Scot, of the blood that ran in the chieftains of the Clan Cameron, but her mother was a French half-breed from the Red River Settlement, and the girl strongly resembled her Cree grandmother. She smiled shyly. Her soft dark eyes were lowered to a piece of bright silk she was embroidering. With a graceful gesture she indicated something in her guardian's lap.

The missionary's wife held up a dainty sewing bag embroidered in white quills and coloured beads. "She has been making this lovely thing for me and I did not know it," she declared, with an affectionate glance at the girl.

"Oh, what a waste," groaned Archie. "Mrs. Allingham has far more bags than a pedlar now, and I haven't any. What's that lovely thing you're embroidering now?"

The girl swiftly covered the length of scarlet silk with a corner of her shawl.

"Eet is not'ing," she stammered, blushing prettily and darting a glance at the Young Chevalier, who all unconscious was absorbed in watching one of the Orkney seamen who had run aloft, and calculating his chances of following when the Skipper's eye was busy with ice-floes.

Harry Erskine, the young man from Red River, paused beside her.

"Come, Marie Rose!" he cried with the familiarity of an old friend, "confess! It's a L'Assomption belt. Who's the lucky man?"

The young lady was plainly distressed. With a swift movement she slipped the piece of gay silk into her sewing basket.

"You are a mischievous and troublesome lot of boys," declared her chaperon, coming to the rescue. "Run away, Harry, and ask Captain Laird to promise that we shan't

have any ice in the Bay this year. I can't live another week away from my home."

The captain himself was at that moment approaching and paused at the ladies' corner, as he always did whenever he had the opportunity. He had laid aside his seaman's clothes and was dressed for luncheon in a long frock coat and a very high silk hat, a great spread of white collar and a great flare of blue tie. The Skipper of the *Ocean Eagle* was a brave and gallant seaman, very able for his difficult and hazardous task. But like all great men he had his weakness. He loved to array himself in fine raiment and parade his deck on a sunny day. On this voyage, with the unusual privilege of ladies' company, he had bedecked himself every day, storm or calm, ice-floes or fog.

"Ah, one cannot make authoritative statements about the Bay, Mrs. Allingham," he said, smiling and flourishing a delicate cambric handkerchief highly perfumed. "She is like a lady and always surprises one with her moods. Her chief fault is that she has carelessly left her back door open into the Arctic, and that long hallway of Fox's Channel is a very convenient entry for the ice. It may be here ahead of us, for all our fine weather." He looked at the far shining horizon, and suddenly stopped flicking his perfumed handkerchief. He glanced up at the lookout and frowned, then passed quickly on. Charles Stuart had noted the Skipper's sudden change of expression and, rising, followed him in the hope that some new excitement might be approaching.

A sudden cold wind blew up from the west, and the elder woman rose. Young Sinclair gave her his arm to her cabin, and the girl followed with slow steps. Marie Rose Cameron, raised in the freedom of a Hudson's Bay Company post in the wilds of Rupert's Land still wore her Edinburgh silks as though they had been a suit of heavy armour.

Safe in the seclusion of her little stateroom, she took the length of scarlet silk from her basket. It was a sash,

beautifully embroidered, such as was worn by men in her country on festive occasions. She opened her box and flung it in with a petulant movement.

"A'm never give it to him, me," she cried, relapsing into the vernacular.

She sat down on the side of her berth, her face dark and sombre. In some moods Marie Rose Cameron was beautiful, in others quite the reverse. When her face was in repose and her eyes lowered she had the stolid, heavy countenance of the Indian woman. But when she spoke and smiled, her liquid eyes danced, her perfect teeth gleamed, and she was transformed into a sparkling French girl. She was not at her best these days. Her year in Edinburgh had been a year in prison; and the shadow of it still lay upon her spirit. In spite of the care of teachers and a rather dismayed aunt, Marie Rose had not learned to love civilisation. At home, in moccasins and leggings, with a canoe and paddle, a fishing net, gun or trap, she was lithe, swift, gay, and as lovely as a prairie rose. To-day, in stiff shoes and the constraining bodice and full skirts of fashion, she was bound down both in body and soul.

Suddenly she flung herself upon her berth regardless of all her Edinburgh finery.

"Oh, my modder, my modder!" she whispered. "Let me come home! Let me come home!"

CHAPTER III

A Race with Death

TO Charles Stuart this journey to Rupert's Land even on the dullest days was a voyage of wonder and delight. For he was sailing the sea lanes opened up by Hudson in his tiny *Discovery*, and night and day he accompanied with Radisson and Groseillers, and hailed across the wild waters the barques of Mackenzie and Franklin. So when the great advancing hosts of ice-floes in their glittering armour surrounded the *Ocean Eagle* and held her a prisoner for two weeks, his joy knew no bounds; for how many of his great fore-runners had met this experience!

All one sunny day the beleaguering army crept nearer, massing at the bow, closing in at the stern. The patches of blue water grew smaller and at last disappeared. Sails were furled, and at this sign of surrender, the enemy crept underneath and gently raised the great ship up onto a solid floor of ice and there she lay on her side like an abandoned vessel of some early Hudson's Bay explorer.

After a month and a half on shipboard it was glorious to escape, and passengers and crew were soon swarming out on the ice. The three young men ran and played leap frog over the hummocks like boys let loose from school, and the first night Charles, the adventurous, led his two companions out by the dim shifting rays of the Northern Lights, and stripping they plunged into a pool, leaped out and into their clothes in mad haste, and raced back to the ship red hot and gasping.

He led the crew in their musical performances, too, for he could play the fiddle and sing and dance simultaneously. The idle seamen held a continuous concert in the evenings and the icy wastes rang with Gaelic songs: "Lochaber No

More," "My Faithful Fair One," and many an Orcadian song of love and longing from the men of the Misty Islands.

The three young adventurers had just arranged a foot-ball match between the larboard and starboard watches, when, on the morning the performance was to take place, the weather suddenly grew milder. The Skipper, dressed in splendour, even in the mornings of these days of leisure, addressed the passengers at the sloping breakfast table, promising them a speedy release from captivity.

"And no one should venture upon the ice to-day," he concluded, looking at the would-be foot-ball manager. "The ice may break up at any moment."

The most adventurous of the Gentleman Adventurers obeyed the Skipper for one day. But on the following morning it was plain that a frost had cemented the rotting ice again, and as no specific orders were issued at table the three young men ventured down the ladder once more.

The girl from Rupert's Land stood leaning over the rail, watching them. Every day as the crew capered over the ice she had stood upon the sloping deck, her eyes full of longing to be one of them. She had several times induced Mrs. Allingham to descend for a little exercise. But the elder lady soon became chilled, trying to walk over the slippery, uneven surface.

There was no place on board at which to warm oneself, for the sixty tons of gunpowder in the hold of the *Ocean Eagle* made a fire a forbidden luxury to all but the cook in his little galley.

On this morning the chaperon had gone below after breakfast and the girl was alone on deck, watching the Young Chevalier scamper over the ice.

His two followers had turned rebels and had joined hands in a plot to push him into one of the many pools of water. They had succeeded sufficiently to give him a good splashing; and, with a belaying pin, borrowed hastily from one of his friends among the crew, he was after his enemies hot for vengeance.

They raced shouting past the ship. "Come down and help us, Marie Rose!" roared Harry Erskine. "He'll murder us!"

The light of a daring resolution leaped up in the girl's eyes. Catching up her long skirts, she fled down the sloping deck and the leaning stairway to her cabin. In an incredibly short time she came up again, transformed. She was dressed in her old home costume: a short, fringed buckskin skirt, leggings and jacket. On her trim feet she wore a pair of yellow deer-skin moccasins, beaded and embroidered. Her long dark hair hung in two braids far below her waist, and she had bound a strip of bead-work around her forehead and stuck a scarlet quill in it. The next moment she was down the rope ladder like a squirrel, and away out on the rough sea of ice, leaping from hummock to hummock as wild and graceful as a fawn.

Mrs. Allingham, who with the mate's assistance had just arrived at her sloping seat on the deck, gazed out at the flying figure, amazed at the sudden transformation of the quiet, well-behaved young lady into a beautiful savage. The three young men, their feud forgotten, had joined her, and the four were racing towards the ship, the girl far in the lead.

She caught sight of her guardian and stopped short. The elder woman waved her scarf indulgently. She was familiar with half-breed girls, and rightly guessed that this was probably the first breath of life poor Marie Rose had drawn since she sailed for Edinburgh.

They were turning for another run, when the burly blue-clad figure of the mate leaned over the railing above them.

"It's not safe this morning, Miss Cameron," he boomed. "Better come aboard. Skipper's orders."

"Come at once, Marie Rose!" called Mrs. Allingham in alarm.

All the lovely brightness faded from the girl's face. "Just one leetle run more," she pleaded.

Her three champions came close to the vessel's side to

plead her cause. Archie Sinclair and Harry Erskine even climbed to the deck to intercede.

"She's just come out, Mrs. Allingham," called Charles, who was waiting the verdict, standing holding the rope ladder, "and she's enjoying it like a sea-bird," he added, turning laughingly to the girl, where she stood poised on the tip of a hummock like a bird about to take wing.

It was at this moment that it happened. There came a sudden deafening crashing and grinding, as though the timbers of the *Ocean Eagle* were being rent asunder. The ship rolled over like a man awakened from sleep, and splashed into the water with a great gurgling and upsurging of seas, and the next moment she was riding the blue water, erect and beautiful after her long siesta!

Charles realised afterwards that this was what happened. What he realised immediately upon the first tremendous crash was a shout of warning in the mate's trumpet voice, and then great billows of icy water were surging over his head. He came up, after what seemed an age, gasping and streaming, but still hanging on to the rope ladder for dear life. A solid cake of ice came up under him. He planted his feet upon it and was reaching to climb the ladder, dimly aware of a shouting gesticulating crowd about him, when, through the clamour, he caught a wild cry behind him. The girl! He turned and though his eyes were streaming with salt water he saw her. She was standing alone, her arms outstretched, on a rocking ice island in the midst of the heaving flood. One glance, and the Young Chevalier placed his hands against the side of the ship and gave himself a mighty shove outward. The next moment he had leaped across the narrowing space to her side. It all happened in one wild moment; and almost before the people on board had realised that the ice had broken up, they were looking out at two of the passengers cast away on a rapidly retreating ice-floe.

There arose a storm of shouting, of hurrying feet and issuing of orders. The Skipper's sonorous voice roared a warning, and a rope, aimed by the brawny arm of an

Orkney seaman came whirling out. It fell on the edge of their island and they both leaped for it, and the next instant leaped back. A third part of the ice island had broken away, and they just missed being pitched headlong into the sea.

The rope was gathered swiftly in, and again it was sent out with a mighty swing. But the current that had carried the ice in from the Arctic was bearing the little island, with its precious cargo, farther and farther away, and this time the rope fell some fathoms short. The Skipper was shouting orders now and the long idle sails were swiftly hoisted to prevent the vessel from drifting farther from them, for there was no hope of launching a boat in this moving sea of ice. Standing, holding each other by the hand like a pair of children, the two castaways caught the Skipper's signals. He was urging them forward against the current. Charles caught his meaning. The ice-floes around them were still fairly close together. If they could leap from one to another they might work near enough to the ship to reach the rope.

He turned to the girl: "Can you jump so far?" he asked. Even in the midst of their appalling danger he could not help noticing how calm she was.

"Jump? But, yes," she cried, speaking in her mother-tongue. He caught her hand and they dashed across the little island and leaped for the next floe, and the next and the next. The girl did not run, she flew. Her little moccasined feet scarcely touched the crest of a hummock before she was in the air again. They were running nearer and nearer to the ship and above the shouts and heartening cheers, Charles could distinguish Archie's voice, hoarse and anguished.

"Run, Charlie, old boy! R-u-n, Old Chevalier!"

But though they were drawing nearer, the blue water spaces were growing every moment wider. Charles was filled with dim wonder at the girl. She was taking the lead now and could be stopped by nothing. She leaped from floe to floe without apparent effort; the scarlet flame

of the feather in her dark hair rose as she flew, like the crest of a soaring bird. They were racing now for a large island that would surely bring them within reach of the waiting rope. But Charles was appalled by the sight of the channel running between them and it. As they raced down the slope of their island he shouted to the girl to stop, but she paid no more attention than one of the gulls flying above the *Ocean Eagle*. Like a gull she took the leap, soared over the water and landed on the other side. As Charles leaped after her a mighty cheer went up from the ship and a warning shout. Out shot the rope once more whirling high into the air and descending in sweeping circles. The two young people watched it, holding their breath. It fell just a few yards short and a groan from the vessel answered their disappointed cry.

But now the *Ocean Eagle* had been slowly working nearer, and after a few moments' anguished waiting the rope came hurtling out once more. Again it fell short, but not in the sea this time. It landed on an ice-cake near them. It meant a desperate leap to reach it, but it might be their last chance. "Stay here," Charles commanded the girl, "I can jump for it and I'll throw you the end."

He ran up to the high centre of their island to get a start and made a mad dash for it. He leaped the space like a young deer, and landed just upon the edge of the floe; a piece of ice gave way under him; he clutched a hummock and slipped to his waist in the water, clinging desperately to his slippery support.

There was a wail of dismay from the vessel which changed instantly to a cry of amazed admiration. Like an arrow from a bow Marie Rose was coming down the slope of the ice island. Like a bird she took the leap, landed safe with a good yard to spare, sprang and caught him just as his numbing fingers were slipping from their support.

Marie Rose Cameron had not been bred in an Edinburgh school for young ladies. She had spent her life in the forest, and her muscles were strong from wielding the

paddle and running with the dog sleighs. She caught Charles with a grip of steel and hauled him up onto the ice. The rope lay at his hand as he wormed his way to safety, and as he clutched it such a thunderous cheer burst from the vessel that the circling gulls shot up into the heavens, white wings fluttering in alarm.

Charles staggered to his feet, and with the skill learned on board ship whipped the rope around the girl just beneath her arms and slipped a knot securely.

"But you too," she whispered breathlessly; and when he refused she caught his hand and held it tightly.

"A'm not let go, me," she whispered, her eyes shining.

And now the little craft was being towed towards the vessel, the men hauling on the rope with a greater good will than they had ever hauled the big bowline. Slowly and cautiously, lest the frail ice boat go to pieces against the ship they brought her alongside. The little craft touched, held, the castaways grasped the rope ladder amid a din of cheering; and the next moment they were hauled on deck.

They were caught up in a wild clamour of welcome. Archie, white and shaking, could only hold his friend's hand in silence. Mrs. Allingham caught the girl in her arms, the tears running down her face. Marie Rose's breath was coming in gasps from her desperate run, but she was radiant and unafraid.

She turned to Charles, when he would have given her all the praise.

"No, no, no," she cried, showing for the first time signs of agitation. "You—you came to me!" Tears choked her utterance. "You came to me!" she whispered.

They were hurried away below, and with happy hearts the crew went to their work. To the inspiring strains of "Haul Away the Bowlin'" they sheeted home the canvas, the *Ocean Eagle* spread her wings and away she flew for York Roads.

CHAPTER IV

York Factory

ONE afternoon, as the *Ocean Eagle* was slipping along over the sparkling green water, the Young Chevalier, leaning over the rail, sniffed the air enquiringly.

"What's that perfume?" he asked. "Something delightful."

Archie looked up from the skein of scarlet silk which he was helping Miss Cameron unwind. What was it, that strange, elusive fragrance coming on the breeze?

Marie Rose suddenly dropped her silks. She threw out her hands towards the west as if in greeting. "Spruce!" she murmured. "I smell de spruce tree!"

She was right, they were nearing land. The western breeze, travelling over a thousand miles of forest had brought the message from its heart. It was the half-breed girl's welcome home.

Charles looked down at her, smiling sympathetically. They had become very good friends since their adventure on the ice together, and she had resumed her work on the scarlet silk sash.

The promise of the spruces was soon fulfilled. In a few days they had anchored in "Five Fathom Hole" in the mouth of the Nelson and were speeding up the river in a coast schooner to York Factory. The long northern summer day was drawing to its close when the travellers stepped out upon the wooden platform before the fort. York Factory stood on the north bank of the river in a stockaded space of about five acres. The place consisted of a group of large buildings, stores, warehouses and dwellings, all constructed of logs and covered with clapboards. A tall flag-staff before the gate and two pieces of cannon mounted on either side gave the place a military

air. Behind lay a flat, dreary landscape, stretching far inland to the dark line of the scrub forest and inhabited by myriad waterfowl that rose clanging and screaming into the air.

But the fort itself presented a lively appearance. York Factory was a little town in the wilderness, its population at this summer season numbering about two hundred men, beside women and children, and the neighbouring Indian encampments. A large bell in the centre of the square was ringing, the flag floated crimson above the buildings, and a crowd of bronzed, bearded, moccasined men were standing at the landing to welcome them.

The Skipper stepped out first, and was greeted warmly by his old friend the "Bourgeois," or head of the fort. Chief Factor MacKay was a well-educated, cultured gentleman, who, in spite of his many years in the wilds, still retained his stately old-world manner. He showed especial courtesy to the two ladies and handed them over to the missionary as though they were visiting princesses and he the monarch of all the broad acres surrounding his northern palace.

Standing with their bags over their shoulders a little apart, Charles and Archie caught sight of a familiar face—Johnny McBain himself, dressed like a voyageur in moccasins and sash, his round face much rounder and browner than when they had last seen it in St. Andrew's. But Johnny's rotund countenance suddenly elongated; his generous mouth fell open; a queer expression of astonished dismay, with joy struggling for the mastery, contorted his face. He fairly leaped upon his two friends.

"It—it—it—isn't—" he stuttered.

"It is; it are. We're both here!" cried Charles gleefully, staggering under the onslaught of his reception. Johnny McBain's heart had been starving for the sight of an old friend, but now that these two stood before him he had no word of welcome.

"Oh, you big fools! You moonnyasses! What possessed you to come out to this God-forsaken place?"

"Why, you and your carriage-and-six," cried Archie indignantly.

"A carriage-and-six! You blockheads! Six what?"

"Johnny McBain, were you drawing the long bow again?" demanded the Young Chevalier solemnly.

"Oh, why were some people born without imagination? Wouldn't any idiot know that I meant a rickety old sled and my six brutes of dogs?"

They shouted with laughter at their own expense. Old Johnny was evidently the same old Johnny. He seized their bags and led them towards the fort, pouring out mingled joy and lamentations.

They pushed their way along the board walk, through crowds of Company officers, sailors, scarlet-sashed boatmen, naked Indians, women with shawled heads, wild looking little brown children, and everywhere dogs of all descriptions.

The two newcomers were led across the square to the "Summer House" where transients were lodged. They stepped into a bare hallway and up a wide echoing stairway, lighted dimly with candles. The place was used only in the summer, when York Factory was at its busiest, and was furnished but barely. Each small room had a pine bed, with wooden slats for a mattress, where a traveller threw his blankets and slept with his clothes on, as a hardy servant of the Company should. There were many transients at York Factory from every important post in Rupert's Land, and the bare echoing halls resounded with the deep notes of men's voices.

Though the long northern twilight still lingered in the pale sky, the busy fort was settling for the night. After an hour of hungry questions about home from Johnny McBain, the two newcomers partially undressed and lay down on their hard beds. It was good to feel a stationary foundation beneath one again and to smell the damp sweet odours of mother earth and the scent of spruce and pine floating in through the open window. In spite of the talk and laughter down in the square, the sounds of fiddling

and dancing from the servants' quarters, and the occasional howling of dogs the travellers slept profoundly.

It seemed as though they had scarcely closed their eyes when they were awakened by a frightful din; outside a fiendish barking and howling; inside hurrying feet and the alarmed voices of men; somewhere in the distance the loud clanging of a bell. Charles leaped from his bed, and went crashing into Archie, rushing towards him out of the darkness.

"What is it? Is the fort on fire?" they shouted to the echoing hallway.

"Wolves!" It was Johnny McBain's voice as he dashed past the door. "Get your guns, boys! There's two hundred wolves at the gate! Hurry!"

The two new apprentice clerks leaped into their clothes, Charles wondering even in the midst of his desperate haste at the criminal ignorance of the stay-at-home folk for he had always been taught that wolves never attacked!

"Come on, you greenhorns!" roared Harry Erskine. "Every man to the gate, and be quick about it!"

Some one had lit a candle in the hall and the flickering light showed the forms of armed men hurrying down the corridor. Seizing their guns, which they had kept near them ever since landing, the two boys followed, Archie remembering with dismay that his was not loaded, but determined to sell his life dearly with the heavy end.

They went tearing down the stair at the heels of the flying figures and out into the square. The fort bell was still clanging madly, and away at one end of the enclosure the howling of fiendish brutes arose furiously. York Factory was built on a muskeg, and the wide board walks were really bridges connecting the different buildings. The newcomers did not know this, and were soon floundering and staggering in the mud and water. They stumbled along in the darkness, following in the direction in which the others had disappeared. Charles scrambled up on a plank walk again, and charged across the stockade, leaving Archie far behind.

Dodging around buildings, he came up at last against a high fence around a corral. Inside he could discern dimly the forms of several scores of dogs sitting up on their haunches and baying the Northern Lights in enthusiastic discord. The bell had ceased ringing, the shouting had died away. Outside the dog corral a sudden calm seemed to have fallen upon the fort. Scouting around, his gun ready, Charles paused, halted by a dread suspicion of something far more to be feared than wolves. He darted back to the walk, where a couple of figures were approaching. If Johnny McBain and that Erskine villain had dared to play any of their vile tricks he would pay them well in their own rascally coin!

Slipping into the deep shadow between two tall buildings, he waited.

The two figures advanced, and the would-be avenger effaced himself in the shadows. He recognised with dismay the voice of the Chief Factor and the gaunt figure of the Reverend Mr. Allingham, whom he had met upon landing. They passed close to him, in deep conference.

"The poor child must not be forced into this marriage," the missionary was saying. "When Anderson comes she will be gone, and we can explain. I don't care whether Cameron is offended or not. She must be sent home with the brigade. I will not be a party to any such tyranny. My wife and I will take all the responsibility."

"It's a heavy responsibility to offend Cameron of Norway House, Mr. Allingham, but I'll share it with you. He may be so glad to see her, after the long separation, that he will forgive us all. It is natural that, after risking their lives together, the young people should fall in love."

The voices died away, and Charles stood as still as the old log building, every nerve tingling. A wavering shadow came across the swampy ground towards him, and some one staggered up onto the board walk.

"Arch," he cried in relief, "is that you?"

Archie, the good-natured, was speechless with rage. "It

was Johnny McBain, and that blackguard Erskine, and the other d-dogs," he stuttered. The situation was such that even a sailor vocabulary, picked up on board ship, failed before it.

"Come on," raged the Young Chevalier. "We'll haul them out and dip them in the river! Where is the confounded place, anyhow?"

It was no easy task to find their way back in the darkness. By the time they had wandered around the buildings a couple of times, and sunk in the swamp many more, their wrath was somewhat cooled, and Charles had slightly modified his plan of firing at the windows of the Summer House.

They found the entrance at last, and crept up the creaking stairs. The place was as still as the old graveyard down the river; only the sounds of regular breathing came through the thin partitions; and one innocent young man, whose door was ajar, snored ostentatiously. Filled with murderous thoughts, they tip-toed to the room which, Archie was sure, belonged to their false friend. They opened the door stealthily and were met by a strange voice.

"What's the matter there? Who's that?"

It was an authoritative voice, too, and the intruders backed out hastily. Two more disastrous attempts to locate the lair of their prey sent them back to Charles's room to sit in the darkness on the edge of the bed and plan a fearful revenge.

But sleep brought a calmer mood to Archie; and a wakeful night filled Charles's mind with much more disturbing and serious thoughts. His boy's heart held, far in an inner shrine, a shadowy vision of the girl he would, one day, love. But as yet he had never given even that shadow much thought. His mother had been his comrade and sweetheart. But the luminous shadow was there, and it did not in the least resemble poor Marie Rose Cameron. But he admired and liked her, and the thought of her possible distress made his chivalrous heart sore. He tossed

about on his hard bed and wished with all his soul he had never heard of the Hudson's Bay Company.

The morning sun, streaming through the high bare windows, brought a disposition to laugh at the wolf raid, and they went down to breakfast ready to take their teasing good-naturedly.

The meal was served in a big mess hall, a high bare room with a huge fireplace at one end, over which hung a life-sized picture of Governor Simpson. The stately Chief Factor sat at the head of the long bare table, the other officers arranged according to rank.

Life in the wilderness had set its stamp upon the men. They were all brown and bearded and shaggy looking, and their deer-skin shirts, embroidered in quills, their coloured sashes and beaded ornaments gave them a barbaric air. But they were mostly men of keen intellect, and many were of wide culture, and Charles was glad of the rule that forbade a young apprentice clerk to speak unless spoken to, so interested was he in the conversation.

Breakfast consisted of bread and potatoes and jack-fish, fresh from the river, beautifully cooked. The jolly officer at the foot of the table saw to it that the newcomers were well served. He volunteered an apology for the orgy of the night before.

"We have a number of idle young savages lying about here," he explained, "who haven't enough work to keep them employed, so Satan finds it for them." His eyes twinkled, and he was at some pains to keep from laughing, and Charles was possessed of a dark suspicion that he had heard that voice the night before among the most frantic calls for volunteers.

Johnny McBain showed them about the premises after breakfast, the great warehouses for furs and for merchandise, the residences for the employés, the tinsmith's and the cooper's workshops, the fleet of long prowed boats waiting for the voyage inland. He had to leave them to return to his work, and warned them not to show themselves too useful.

"If the Bourgeois finds you too handy he'll keep you here, and the old burying-ground down there is the liveliest place here in winter. They're sending me out somewhere west. I don't much care where; and if you're careful, you'll get sent, too. Better go and see the graveyard and get out of danger."

They took his advice, wandering down the riverside to the sacred ground where the servants of the Company were laid to rest. They stopped at the little Indian village to visit their old shipmate and the missionaries took them through the pretty church, with the stained-glass window given by Lady Franklin. But Mrs. Allingham's invitation to stay to lunch, as Marie Rose Cameron and Mrs. MacKay, with whom she was staying, were coming down, threw Charles into a panic. It was absolutely necessary to get back to the fort at once, he declared, realising that he had run into a greater danger than the one from which he was fleeing.

The *Ocean Eagle's* cargo was coming in on the coast schooner, for she must be filled with furs and haste away, lest she be caught in the early winter ice. The fleet of twelve long boats for Fort Garry had to be loaded with merchandise and speed into the interior, lest they, too, be caught. It was all a hurried race with the fleeting northern summer.

The gay, noisy, half-breed boatmen, with their bright sashes and garters, gave the place a carnival air as they hurried up from the water with incredible loads from the ship's cargo.

The fort fairly hummed with work, where it stood solitary in the empty landscape like a large beehive in a bare meadow. There were sixty tons of gunpowder, with bullets and shot in proportion; hundreds of cases of guns for the hunters; miles of twine for fishing nets; traps, axes, files and nails; huge bales of blankets and clothing; bright silk handkerchiefs, silk shirts and gay trifles. There were countless cases of tea and tobacco put up in hundred-pound packages, for all Rupert's Land drank tea and

smoked its pipe in peace or war. And there were several puncheons of rum; but, fortunately for the country, the astute Company had long since discovered that it was disastrous for business and traded it no more to the Indians.

Archie Sinclair went on up to the buildings in hopes of getting a glimpse of Miss Cameron, but Charles lingered fascinated. It was all his boy's dreams come true. He was young Ballantyne, who had probably stood here many a time and watched just such a procession, or Franklin with his visions of a Northwest Passage. He might have been a mere dreamer of dreams but that his active young body and a passion for being up and into whatever work presented itself always drove him into the midst of the battle. A shining bronze Indian and one of the fair new recruits from the Scottish Highlands passed amidst shouts of laughter. Each had been trying to teach the other something of his language, and a Gaelic phrase in the mouth of a Swampy Cree, shouted as a sort of catchword with no idea of its meaning was raising great hilarity. Charles slipped his shoulder under the Highlander's ninety-pound package of tea, and marched up to the fort.

It was not often that an officer joined in the men's work and he was received with great acclaim. He was enjoying himself to the full and making all around him merry by his attempts to stagger up the bank with a load carried, as the freighters did, with the head band, when an Indian boy ran down from the buildings with orders for Apprentice Clerk Stuart and Apprentice Clerk Sinclair to report at once at the office of the Chief Accountant, to hear their fate and receive their appointments.

CHAPTER V

The Voyageurs

WHEN the two new clerks foregathered an hour later with Johnny McBain, to find that they were all bound for Fort Garry, he realised their good fortune more than they did.

"I was hoping we'd be sent out to the buffalo plains," sighed young Stuart, whose rather vague ideas of that happy hunting ground pictured a place where apprentice clerks galloped all day after buffalo, and barely escaped scalping at the hands of the Blackfeet Indians.

"Fort Garry's right in a settlement, isn't it?" enquired Archie. "It'll be rather tame."

"Fort Garry!" cried Johnny McBain, his moccasined feet capering along the walk that led to the provision store. "Why, you moonnyasses, it's called the Fur Trader's Paradise!"

"Hoot mon," cried Charles, in the heavy broad Scots which he and Johnny were wont to affect in their conversations together, "it's a gowden chariot ye'll be ridin', forbye yer carriage an' sax."

"Haud yer whisht, or the wolves'll catch ye," retorted Johnny neatly. He swung open the provision store door. "Now, don't let that Jew, Morrison, sell you an outfit for the whole brigade."

The Jew, Morrison, tried his best. Oilskins, blankets, bedding, tin cooking utensils and a locker of provisions were all necessities for the journey, but the clerk urged many other things upon them, which Johnny forbade.

"What would become of you two babes in the woods if I weren't here. I shudder to think," he declared, as they repaired to his room to array themselves for the voyage.

"Do you know what the word 'moonyass' means? It's the Rupert's Land word for greenhorn, and a far more expressive one."

Coarse shirts, moccasins, a long blue-grey cloth capote with silver buttons, a blue peaked cap and a scarlet sash, transformed each young gentleman into a voyageur.

Charles ran back to his own room, feeling light and airy in his moccasins. A little old wrinkled half-breed, who seemed to be the janitor of the Summer House, was standing at his door, holding a parcel wrapped in one of the red silk Hudson's Bay handkerchiefs.

"Dat Mam'selle—what you call—Cameraw, she say, give heem dat," he remarked with grave politeness, and padded away in his brown moccasins.

Charles spread out the contents on his bed. There was a beautiful white cabri-skin fire-bag, such as the men used for carrying their pipes and tobacco and the means for making a fire in the wilderness. It was heavy with bead and quill embroidery of exquisite pattern, and inside it was carefully folded the scarlet silk sash that Marie Rose had been working on on the *Ocean Eagle*.

He sat down and stared at them dismayed, all his gay spirits drooping, a lump rising in his throat.

He felt ashamed and humble and very hard and cruel because the gift gave him no pleasure. Poor little Marie Rose! He had a real small-boy longing for his mother, that he might tell her his trouble and ask her advice.

Archie came whistling down the corridor and he swept the pretty finery into his bag, feeling as a thief might when he conceals his booty.

The next morning, amid much noise and shouting and laughter, the twelve long boats of the Red River Brigade were moored at the river bank ready for the journey of some seven hundred miles into the wilderness, where Fort Garry stood at the gateway of the prairies.

Each boat held between ninety and a hundred bales, known as "pieces," each "piece" weighing nearly one hundred pounds.

Twelve strong, brown, merry fellows, broad of back and sturdy of limb, all in the picturesque voyageur garb, were ready with oars perpendicular, bowsman, steersman and guide all in their places. The men were mostly French and Indian half-breeds, with a sprinkling of English half-breeds, and some dozen Indians belonging to the Swampy branch of the great Cree tribe. There were also a few of the new recruits from Orkneys and the Hebrides, easily distinguished by their fresh faces and their white blanket capotes. The astute Hudson's Bay Company, with their policy of "dividing to rule," arranged these mixtures of races. The lords of Rupert's Land, like the powers in the days of the building of the mighty Tower, forestalled any possible union of forces against them; and so it was that every fort or trading post or boat or cart brigade under the Company's rule presented a very Babel of tongues.

The Chief Factor and some of his officers came down to the shore to see them embark. Two of the officers going to Red River were accompanied by their wives; and looking up Charles caught sight of Miss Cameron in their company. She was pale and her face was heavy and downcast. He guessed at the struggle she had been through to come away against the will of parents and friends, and he stepped up to her in an impulse of pity.

Her face lit up and her eyes shone as he stammered out his thanks for her gifts.

"Eet is not'ing," she declared with one of her swift, graceful gestures, "if you like dem; if you wear dem. You go Fort Garry?"

"Yes, Archie and Mr. Erskine and I will all be together for a while longer, and our old friend Mr. McBain. May I bring him over and introduce him?" he asked nervously.

They were interrupted by a shout from the tall brown guide: "Embark! Embark!" and Charles sprang towards his boat with a feeling of relief.

Every one leaped on board. Goodbyes were exchanged between water and land in English, Gaelic, French, and Cree, and the dialects of all four. Oars flashed to the

water, the crew burst into the old chanson sung from Hudson's Bay to the Rockies:

En roulant, ma boule roulant,
En roulant, ma boule.

And away they swept up the shining tide of the River Hayes.

It was a glorious journey for the two new Gentlemen Adventurers. Every day was a delight from the leap out of their beds in the grey of the early morning at the shout of "Leve! Leve!" from the guide, to the evening hour when, worn out, they flung themselves upon their couch of spruce boughs, and lulled by the music of the rapids and the deep voices of the boatmen following the guide in their evening prayers, they fell into a dreamless sleep.

The young officers of the company were not expected to work their passage as the servants were, but Charles Stuart could not sit in a boat dreaming of Franklin and see the men straining at the towing line.

On a lake or a broad river where the sails could be used the crew had an easy time, but for the remainder of the journey their toil was incredible. It was uphill for every mile of river and whether they were rowing against a fierce current, or running along the shore with the towing line, poling up a rapid, "warping" the boat against the flood by throwing the line around a tree and pulling, or carrying a hundred-pound "piece" over rock and hill, the trip-men performed feats for giants. And yet, at the end of a day of superhuman labour, when they had eaten a superhuman meal of pemmican and dried meat and fish and duck and venison, they were ready to take out the fiddle and dance the Red River Jig on any available flat stone by the river's bank.

Charles was irresistibly drawn to these gay boatmen, who met the most unsurmountable obstacles with a laugh and a jest. Whenever they came to tracking grounds he was out of the boat and into harness with them. He

learned to sing the wild chansons of Pierre Falcon, the prairie poet who had celebrated the great doings of the Bois Brulé in song; and he borrowed a very warped and squeaky fiddle and learned to play the Red River Jig in one lesson. And when he had carried his ninety-pound "piece" of tobacco in its red canvas casing over a bad portage, he was adopted as their very brother.

"The white-headed master is coming!" the Swampy steersman shouted one day, in a bit of severe "forcing," when the line became tangled in underbrush, and the boats were slipping. "Waby-stig-wan is coming!"

Charles came leaping up the rocks, flung himself upon the line, and with a yell the boats were up and over the height. From that day his name was "Waby-stig-wan," "the white-headed master," a name that was his all the days he spent in the Hudson's Bay service.

He would have been perfectly happy but for the shadow of Marie Rose Cameron which occasionally obscured the sunshine of his days. Much to his relief she was in a boat far to the rear of his, and he saw her only at a distance when they made camp, and though Archie and Johnny McBain and young Erskine paid the ladies a visit almost every evening, while he held aloof he was keenly aware of the girl's presence and he grew increasingly anxious as they approached her home as to the reception she would receive from her stern father.

"I thought Marie Rose was to be married at York," Harry Erskine said, one wet night as they curled up in the stern sheets of a boat. "That's why Papa Cameron sent her to Edinburgh, so that she might be educated up to the requirements of Chief Trader Anderson. But she didn't wait till he arrived. I guess it's off."

Johnny McBain joined in the speculations with a suspicious eye upon his friend, but the Young Chevalier merely rolled over in his blankets and feigned sleep.

September was waning and the nights were growing wet and chill and the mornings foggy, when one morning they passed out of the winding forest lane of their last river

and sailed over Playgreen Lake, a northern arm of the great inland sea, Lake Winnipeg. And there on its rocky island against its background of lone lake and forest rose Norway House, the home of Marie Rose Cameron.

"This is where old Murder reigns," Johnny McBain explained. "His name's Murdock Cameron, and every one who has worked under him is convinced that there was a mistake made when he was christened and they meant to call him Murder. He's Marie Rose's papa, you know, Charlie. He's the Gitchie Manitou of these parts too. He may want to keep you here because you got his girl out of the ice. On the other hand, he may send you to the Mackenzie River for it. So look out."

Johnny McBain had no notion of just how anxiously Charles was looking out for this man. He had a curious feeling that he ought to go to him and take the blame for his daughter's disobedience.

Norway House was a handsome well-kept fort, and was at this time the centre of the great Company's trade. The rush of the summer's work was almost over, but two rival brigades of boatmen crowded the landing and shouted a challenge to the Fort Garry men as they swept up to the shore.

Near the main buildings of the fort stood the Chief Factor's house, a comfortable looking residence set in a fine garden, still aglow with autumn blooms. Down the board walk from this place came a big burly man, tall and powerful-looking, with a long waving brown beard and a round jolly hairy face—the chief of the island fortress coming forward to receive the embassy from the sea.

"Cameron," announced Harry Erskine, and Charles leaned out to look fearfully for Marie Rose.

Her boat had just touched the land a few yards ahead, and he saw her leap to the shore, and, darting round a group of officers, fly up the board walk towards the house as though her feet were winged. A woman with a blanket over her head was coming slowly down the garden path. Suddenly the two figures rushed together. Charles drew

a great breath of relief and joy. Marie Rose was safe in her mother's arms.

He saw her again just as he was leaving a few hours later. Seated in the stern of the last boat, ready for their voyage across Lake Winnipeg, he looked back and caught sight of her standing quite near, in the shadow of a clump of small spruce trees. There was something very pathetic in the droop of her figure. Charles stood up and waved his cap in farewell and she waved her shawl. As long as the fort was in sight he could see her standing there, alone, on the shore, still gazing after him.

CHAPTER VI

"O, Brignal Banks Are Wild and Fair"

A FEW days of wild boat-racing down the far blue reaches of that great inland sea, Lake Winnipeg, and the voyageurs once more took to their oars and swung into the reedy mouth of the Red River, amid a storm of water-fowl.

The crew were decked out in their bravest: new sashes, gay garters, hair oiled and curled, and caps set jauntily atilt. For here was the beginning of the Red River Settlement. From Indian lodge, and half-breed cabin along the wooded shore, arose shouts of welcome to the men returned safe from their perilous voyage; and already a gathering crowd was moving opposite them up the shore to welcome home husband or father or sweetheart. The men shouted and sang and swung their oars with prodigious strength, for invisible hands had caught up the towing line and no rapid could hold them back.

There was something in this homecoming that brought a lump into the throats of the young exiles so far from their own native land. Charles was silent and Archie made a brave attempt to whistle the boatmen's song.

A few miles up the river, and high up on the rocky bank there frowned down upon them the heavy stone walls and bastions of Lower Fort Garry: an imposing fortress built on the solid rock, a relic of the days when the Northwest fur trading company rivalled the Gentlemen Adventurers, and they bargained behind stockades and drank their black tea "through the helmet barred."

Here the brigade halted for a day and the two newest adventurers resolved upon a Red River Expedition of their own. Harry Erskine's family met him and carried

him off rejoicing homeward, and Johnny McBain was taken into the fort office to do some work, so they were left to their own resources.

"Let's walk up to Fort Garry," Charles Stuart suggested, "and see the Red River Settlement." For the Young Chevalier was living in the magic past and felt as though he must meet Lord Selkirk up there on the prairie and live again the tumultuous history of his intrepid colonists.

Something less than twenty miles, the walk would have been by the King's Highway, the road that led up to Fort Garry. But the two Adventurers chose to follow the windings of the river and make it nearly thirty. There was very little interest on the highway, for the Red River Settlement was strung along the river, the houses close to the water, the narrow ribbon-like farms stretching far back onto the prairie, for the river had always been the chief highway, the Main Street of the town besides the chief food and water supply.

The two boys swung along gaily in their moccasins, keeping close to the wooded shore. Facing the river stood the long line of settlers' cabins. They were rough and homely and made of logs but looked very comfortable. When they reached the English and Scottish settlement there were signs of prosperity. Here there was always a fine haystack and a long wood pile by the door, particularly at the homes of the thrifty Selkirk Settlers. Both hay and wood were free for the taking, the river teemed with fish, the prairie with game and the life of the Red River Settlement in those happy days before the boom came very near Utopia.

It was a perfect Autumn day, such a day as only a prairie Autumn can produce, warm and clear and as exhilarating as wine. When the thinning woods along the river opened up their first glimpse of the wide grassy sea the two explorers experienced something like intoxication. The great flawless blue blank of the sky, the golden blank of the prairie and the pure crystal clearness of the air that

made far-off objects seem near at hand made up a new world, thrilling with prospects of adventure. An Indian, riding down the trail, miles away on the other side of the low banks, a swirl of prairie chickens high into the air, a birch-bark canoe darting down the river with a naked Indian at the stern, a singing, shouting boat-load of Metis fishermen, a young Highland farmer riding up to his log house, a half-breed girl in her buckskin skirt and blue head shawl were all wonderful sights. The magic on the letters H. B. C. that had lured them so far from home grew more glittering with every mile.

"There's just one flaw in this country," Charles declared, as they scrambled over a rough fence that divided one settler's ribbon from another. "I wish pemmican grew on the trees. Do you realise that this expedition is now in danger of perishing from starvation?"

Boy-like they had made no preparation for such a contingency, but Archie was a Highland Scot and knew his people.

"It would be an insult to pass through a Highland glen hungry at home, and I'll wager these people haven't changed through being transplanted. Let's go in here and ask for a lunch."

"Just ask for a drink of water first," amended the cautious Lowlander.

They walked up to the next house, a low log structure with a neat yard, and a shaggy dog asleep on the sunny door-step. The dog leaped up, barking fiercely, and the door slowly opened. An old woman in a blue homespun dress, a checked apron and a neat white cap peered out enquiringly. She looked so much like the kindly old Highland bodies whom they had both loved in the days when they visited Archie's grandmother that the two exiles went straight to her.

"Good morning," said the Young Chevalier, cap in hand. "Would you be so kind as to give us a drink of water?"

She held up a pair of shaking hands and said something

quite unintelligible to him, but it made Archie push him quickly aside and answer in the same foreign language. The result was magical. The old woman gave a cry of joy and catching the young Highlander round the neck, gave him a resounding kiss, and continued to clap him on the back and rejoice and weep over him as if he had been a long lost son. Then they were pulled bodily indoors, the Sassenach sharing the welcome for his friend's sake.

The one room of the home was beautifully clean and tidy, but very bare. A billowy feather bed stood in one corner, there was a plain pine table scrubbed white, and benches instead of chairs. Over the fire hung a big black pot bubbling cheerfully and sending out a most appetising odour.

Calling loudly for Betsy to bring a bowl of cream and a plate of cakes their hostess set them upon a bench behind the white table, never ceasing in her loud rejoicing. Betsy hurried in from the lean-to at the back: a stout, handsome young woman, with a couple of bare-legged little Highlanders at her heels. She was as glad to see them as the mother-in-law.

"Father and the boys will be away hunting, indeed," she explained apologetically, as though she felt they should have remained at home to welcome them. "And mother hasn't much English. But we're just that glad to see you, whatever."

The plate of smoking hot bannocks, and the dish of cream, so rich it would not pour, were supplemented by a bowl of steaming soup from the pot on the fire, and the two hungry voyageurs ate their first Red River meal with true voyageur appetite.

It had been very easy to get into this first Red River home, but it proved correspondingly difficult to get away. The old lady bewailed their going, Betsy begged them just to wait till father and the boys came in from the fishing so that they might have the benefit of their company and even the two wild little white-headed natives shyly added their coaxings.

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They got away at last, their pockets filled with bannocks, the old woman following them down the slope, heaping Gaelic benedictions upon their heads and reiterating invitations to return.

After such unqualified success they called at a house whenever they felt hungry or thirsty, and in every place their welcome was as warm. Whether it was a Highland Scotch or an English or French half-breed home, the Red River Settlement had its arms open for the young strangers.

"Come away in and have a piece," was the greeting from any one who spied them from the doorway of a Scottish home.

"This is a land flowing with cream and bannocks!" cried Charles, when they had finished their third lunch. "They must have thought I was Lord Selkirk."

They were descending into a deep little ravine where their path was crossed by a stream cutting its way to the river. Poplars and willows, and a few Manitoba maples, turning a splendid crimson, grew along the banks and in the ravine; a pretty bit of woodland in the almost treeless expanse. They plunged into the golden shade of the coulee, and as Charles was stepping over the little brook, he paused and leaned against a fragrant clump of cedars. He was the dreamer to-day, seeing and hearing only the great heroes of his boyhood. Radisson and the La Vérendryes passed before him across the sunflooded expanse.

Suddenly away down the leafy glen there arose the sound of singing. It was not the French Chanson that floated up so often from the river, but something entirely new: a Scottish ballad, and the voice was a girl's, young and fresh and sweet.

"Hurrah," called Archie who had climbed to the top of the bank, "here's a fine looking house, quite a mansion. They'll likely ask us to stay a week here."

But Charles still stood by the stream listening, held by the spell of the voice and all it might mean. "Wait a

moment, I want to see what's down there at the end of this glen," he called.

"Pshaw, it's only a burn. Surely you saw enough between here and York Factory. I'm going into this house to show off my Gaelic." He went on out into the sunlight; but, lured by some strange fascination, Charles lingered. The green water murmured softly at his feet; through the yellowing leaves of the poplars the river gleamed and smiled at the end of the little valley. He could hear a movement in the underbrush farther down, then the bark of a small dog from the other side of the stream. And there it was again, that voice singing! It was nearer now and he could distinguish the words:

"O, Brignal Banks are wild and fair
And Greta woods are green,
And you may gather garlands there
Would grace a summer Queen!"

The little dog's bark, sharp and shrill, arose again, and the girl's voice called, as sweetly as it had sung:

"Burk! Come, Burk, you naughty doggie!"

It must have been the wine of the prairie morning that went to Charles's head and prompted his next act. He slipped behind a thick screen of willow and sang in his pure strong baritone:

"O, Brignal Banks are fresh and fair,
And Greta woods are green,
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English queen!"

There was a complete silence following that. Then a little brown spaniel darted around and behind his ambush and, backing up before him, burst into a small storm of indignant yelps and barks.

Charles stepped out abashed from his hiding place and met the singer face to face.

His first feeling was one of overwhelming joy at finding

something so like sister Alison and home in this wilderness, his second of overwhelming shame at his boldness. For this tall slim girl was a lady; one glance told him that. The dignified poise of her head, the level gaze of her blue eyes, the richness and fashion of her dress, her silk shawl and her beaver bonnet, all placed her in a different class from the farm lassies and dusky half-breed girls he had seen that morning.

His voyageur cap was off and he was standing humbly before her stammering apologies before he was quite sure that she was real or only a part of his dreaming. The young lady regarded him steadily for a moment, her little dog sniffing and grumbling around him suspiciously. She was striving to look very haughty and disdainful and might have succeeded to the young man's everlasting abasement, but a dimple suddenly made a dent in the crimson of her cheek and her eyes danced. They looked at each other and laughed like a pair of children.

"It was very improper," she declared, suddenly becoming dignified again.

"Oh, dreadfully," Charles murmured, becoming humble again.

"See, Burk thinks so himself, don't you, Burkie?"

Charles stooped and the little dog suddenly leaped upon him in a burst of friendliness.

The girl's blue eyes widened. "Why, Burk Murray!" she cried in astonishment. "I never saw him allow a stranger to touch him before."

"Perhaps he knows I'm not so bad as I sounded a few minutes ago," pleaded Charles taking the little brown dog up in his arms.

The dimple in her cheek appeared again at that, and Charles looked his admiration so plainly that her eyes dropped to the armful of golden rod she was carrying.

"You see," he hurried to explain, "I've been living in the wilderness so long that I really don't know how to behave now that I'm just back into civilisation. My friend and I have just arrived from York Factory."

She nodded in a friendly fashion. "I thought you were a new apprentice clerk. Perhaps that's why Burk is so friendly. He likes the Company uniform. Don't you, Burkie?" The little dog squirmed and sniffed in Charles's arms.

"What's the matter? Do you want Betty? Betty is his twin sister," she continued confidentially.

"Betty Burk!" cried Charles, harking back to the magic land of history once more. "Now I know why he likes me. My name's Charles Stuart, and he recognised the relationship. Do you remember how the Young Chevalier dressed up as Flora MacDonald's Irish maid and was called Betty Burk?"

He was surprised to see the girl's face suddenly suffused with a deep blush. "Oh," she cried, in very evident embarrassment, "oh, really, is that—can that really be your name? I didn't know—I didn't dream . . ."

The little dog gave a sudden squirming leap out of Charles's arms and went scurrying up the path beside the stream, and a girl's voice, high and clear, with a soft French accent called:

"Flora! Flora MacDonal'! Where you gone to?"

"Oh, I must run," she cried, catching up the end of her shawl hurriedly.

"Oh, wait, wait!" pleaded Charles. "Is that really your name? Are you really . . ."

But she was in a panic to get away. "Good-bye, M'sieur Chevalier," she cried laughing, and gathering her shawl about her she darted up the path in the wake of the little dog.

Charles's first impulse was to give chase, but at that same instant Archie appeared above the bank shouting to him to hurry. Instead he dashed up the slope and away out on the open prairie, his feet keeping time with a strange new ecstasy to the song:

"O, Brignal Banks are wild and fair,
And Greta woods are green!"

CHAPTER VII

"Called from Their Turrets Twain"

IT was a rather weary pair of Gentlemen Adventurers who, late that night, came upon a dark pile of buildings surrounded by a forbidding wall. They stumbled through the gate of Fort Garry and made their way in the darkness to the black bulk of a building from which shone a dim light.

Charles thundered on the door with the butt of his gun, and after a long wait the summons was responded to by the shuffle of slow moccasined feet. The door opened a very narrow crack, and in the light of a dim candle, they could make out the bearded face of a little old man looking exactly like a rather cross Scotch terrier.

"What d'ye want?" he barked out in a terrier-like voice.

"We're the new clerks and we want to see the Chief Factor," answered Charles. "We've walked up from the Lower Fort," supplemented Archie.

"The Bourgeois's gaen doon tae the Lower Fort the day. If ye gang back where ye cam frae ye'll find him," was the inhospitable answer; and muttering "More moonyasses," the old man slammed the door in their faces.

The two travellers turned and looked at each other. They had come hundreds of miles over sea and land at the invitation of the Company and this was the manner of their reception! They were about to give the door a good kicking, when a merry whistle arose from the shadow of the building and a tall figure carrying a lantern came swinging round the corner.

"What! What! The new apprentice clerks turned out on the cold cruel prairie!" cried the stranger jovially.

"Well, the Company treats us all that way sooner or later. I'm a clerk too. Halliday's my name. I suppose yours are Mac-something or you wouldn't be here. I have the distinction of being the only one in the service who hasn't such a handle to his name."

Charles introduced himself and Archie, apologising for the absence of the handle. "Perhaps that's the reason they won't have us," he suggested.

"No fear," declared the stranger. "Those are both real Hudson's Bay names. You'll get along all right. Come along with me. I'll show you where you bunk."

They followed him across a square among towering dark buildings into a large echoing house and up a bare stair like the one at York Factory. The rooms and beds were as bare and cheerless as they had been at the coast, but the two travellers stretched themselves upon the hard slats very gratefully and slept the profound sleep of youth and health, and that night Charles failed to dream of Selkirk, Franklin and Mackenzie, but his rosy visions were all of Flora MacDonald and the Young Chevalier.

Early the next morning they were up and out exploring the big fort within its high walls from the many-windowed warehouses to the dog corral in one corner. It was as lively a place as York Factory, employing eight officers, and some half-dozen servants of the Company: blacksmiths, carpenters, boat and cart builders. These latter were married to half-breed or Indian women, and their log houses, stretched along one side of the enclosure, contained some half-dozen noisy youngsters apiece.

They strolled out through the wide gate between the stone bastions and gazed over the limitless prairie with the Assiniboine River sweeping in from the great west and the Red River winding down from the south.

Across the river were the little log houses of the French settlement, and the high twin towers of St. Boniface Cathedral. A boat load of voyageurs flashed down the river, and the bells from the tower rang out far and sweet—the bells of the poet's Roman Mission that

"Called from their turrets twain
To the boatmen on the river,
To the hunter on the plain."

Another bell, nearer and less musical, clanged out from the tower in the centre of the square: the summons to breakfast. It was a welcome sound, for their voyageur appetites had been sharpened to starvation by the thrilling prairie air. They hastened along the neat board walk to the big building in the centre of the square, which was the Governor's house and where the mess hall was situated. The half-dozen servants of the Company were also hurrying to their morning meal, and the doors of their log shanties slammed sharply as the swarming half-breed youngsters ran in and out.

Governor McTavish was taking his furlough in Scotland, and his place was filled by Chief Factor MacNeill, a man who had worked hard all his life and expected every one under him to do the same. Consequently he was not very popular with some of the young men stationed at the Traders' Paradise, who expected to ride the plains all day and dance all night.

The Chief Factor sat at the head of the table with his secretary at his right hand, and the Fort Doctor at his left. Chief Trader Campbell, the next in rank, sat at the other end of the table. There were eight officers besides the two newcomers, all weather-beaten, bearded men, most of them past middle age.

The mess-room was a huge bare hall with a fireplace and a built-in cupboard. It was bare of ornament or furniture, except the long pine table and the home-made chairs. The dishes were few and heavy, and the cups were without saucers or handles. But the "gold-eye" fish, fresh from the Red River, were deliciously cooked, and the potatoes and other vegetables from the fort garden were very welcome after a month of pemmican and dried meat. The meal was served by their hairy little acquaintance of the night before, who padded about in his moc-

casins and surveyed the "moonyasses" with suspicious sidelong glances.

The two newcomers, being lowest in rank, sat near the foot of the table beside the genial Chief Trader Campbell, a man with a long wavy beard and a deep rumbling voice, who enquired kindly after their welfare. Their gay rescuer of the night before sat next to Charles. It was evident that the rule of silence for the apprentice clerks was not as rigidly observed as at York Factory, for Halliday's tongue ran on all breakfast time.

Under cover of the conversation of his elders, he gave the newcomers an amusing description of each. The Bourgeois, Sanderson, and McMurray were all married to half-breeds, so they must be careful not to make derogatory remarks upon such. "Sanderson there," he said, nodding towards the Chief Accountant, "will curse half-breeds like an old Badger Chief, but let any one else—" he gave the expressive Red River shrug. "McMurray, the one with the straight hair, is more Cree than Orkney, in spite of his name, though great to work with. The Bourgeois is a slave driver. Beware of him. Sanderson's a good sort, but too careful of his dignity. Watch him and see if he doesn't say 'Considering our relative positions' before you finish that fish."

"And what's the news from home, lads?" asked the Doctor, a cheery, ruddy-faced gentleman who looked after the health of a community where no one was ever sick, and had the sort of heart that "doeth good like medicine."

Charles looked up from the generous plate of fish and potatoes which old Geordie had placed before him. "I'm afraid it's almost three months old, sir," he suggested.

"We're used to that," said Campbell good-naturedly. "We never hear anything about what the powers in England are doing until it's all out of fashion."

So rather diffidently the two latest arrivals from the Old Country tried to tell something of the newspaper discussions regarding the amalgamation of the great northwest with the Canadian provinces of the east.

"All idle talk, you may be sure," commented the Chief Factor in his authoritative way. "There's no possibility of those isolated provinces east of us being made into a country, half English and half French, and all strung out in line like a row of skins hung out to be beaten."

"You may be sure that if there are any negotiations of that sort going on, we shall be the last to hear about it," spoke up Mr. Sanderson, the gentleman whose relative position was of such moment to him. "The powers that be in London seem to think that we are their servants and they are the masters. Whereas, considering our relative positions in the service, we should dictate to them."

Halliday raised his eyes and looked at Charles with a far-away innocent expression. "The Chief Accountant has introduced himself," he said in a low tone.

When the meal was over the Chief asked the newcomers to step into his office. Doctor Gordon shook hands with them as they left the table, wishing them all success.

"I hope you will get on well in the service, boys," he said in a fatherly tone. "Don't get into horse-racing and running into debt. And steer clear of those young fellows who want to celebrate too often. And whatever you do," he added, lowering his voice and glancing about him, "don't marry a half-breed!"

The interview with the Chief Factor placed the three newcomers. Johnny McBain, as he had had two years' experience, was to be put into the depot or settlers' store under Chief Trader McMurray, the man with the Indian features and the beautiful Scottish burr. Archie was placed under Chief Trader Campbell, who was in charge of the Indian trading; and Charles was to go into the office to serve the Chief Accountant of Assiniboine district, the gentleman of the relatively important position.

CHAPTER VIII

Fort Garry

THE three elder men among the officers of the fort were married, and lived in apartments of their own, though they all met at mess. The rest of the officers were housed in a building called Bachelors' Hall, and a gay place it proved to be.

The two new arrivals, having had their initiation at York Factory, were on their guard against pranks, but Halliday disarmed their suspicions by inviting them to a little celebration in his room the night after their arrival.

"We always give the newcomers a welcome," he declared hospitably, "and besides it happens to be my birthday, and I feel I owe it to myself to celebrate."

Old Dufresne, the half-breed factotum, who filled the position of janitor to Bachelors' Hall, was given a pound of tobacco to insure his preparing supper. Halliday's room was a festive-looking place. The bare walls were hung with multitudinous ornaments: fire-bags, belts, garters and moccasins of elaborate bead and quill work, and were plastered with pictures of horse races and social events cut from the illustrated London papers.

The party consisted of the younger officers: Ogilvie, private secretary to the Chief; Ferguson, the other clerk; and Johnny McBain, who had arrived late in the afternoon, riding up from the Lower Fort. The Doctor put his head in at the door to smile at the six young men seated with their cards around the candle-lit table. "Sorry I can't join you, boys," he said, "but I'm getting too old for sprints. Don't keep it up too late, like good fellows, and don't make too much noise."

"Sleep with your deaf ear up, Doctor," warned Halliday, "or you'll think there's an Indian uprising."

But they did keep it up very late, and they did make a great deal of noise. It was the custom to initiate all newcomers into the service by putting them under the table. Halliday's allowance of rum had been supplemented by several others and the celebration was much less innocent and good-natured than the one at York Factory.

Charles awoke the next morning with a headache and a deep feeling of depression and humiliation. He had made a fool of himself, just as those fellows had planned. He had a vivid sense of his mother's presence all day; not the comforting presence he was accustomed to, but one that brought the feeling that she was in distress for him. He had felt just so about her the night after he and Marie Rose had so nearly lost their lives in the ice-floes. Archie was in even worse plight, but Johnny McBain's round face was as placid and ruddy as usual.

"You'll have to get used to sharing in a little spree occasionally," he admonished, as he led the two down to breakfast. "It's the only sort of diversion the fellows have in this howling wilderness."

Just after the midday dinner, when Charles was crossing the square to the accountant's office, a young half-breed assistant of the boat-builder came running up from the river.

"De York boat! She come!" he shouted.

The arrival of the brigade was a great occasion. The men had been away from their homes almost all summer, and their families were already swarming down the river bank to meet them. Mr. Campbell gave orders that the stores were to be closed and all business suspended; and, headed by the Bourgeois, the officers went out to welcome them.

They had scarcely reached the gate when the brigade swept into view: ten of the twelve long pointed boats that had come back from York Factory, the men pulling hard

against the current and singing "A La Claire Fontaine." They were decked out in their bravest—new sashes, gay garters, moccasins and coloured feathers. As they swept up to the shore oars flashed to the perpendicular, and a yell rose from one hundred throats that made the old walls of Fort Garry ring.

It seemed as if half the population of the Red River Settlement had come down to the shore to welcome them. There were Indian women in blankets, with their little naked boys; braves in breech-clout and feathers; half-breed women, their bright eyes shining under their blue head-shawls as Louie or Bateese leaped ashore; and there was a goodly sprinkling of the Scottish settlers come out to greet their fellow countrymen.

Chief Factor MacNeill stood at the gate as the procession came swaggering up. He shook hands with the Guide, welcomed them all in a short speech, and led the way up to the fort. They swarmed into the square, followed by the women and children, laughing, shouting, teasing. Charles was spied at once and received an ovation which was not lost upon the quick ears of the Bourgeois. "Waby-stig-wan!" the Guide shouted, and the whole brigade threw up its caps in a wild cheer.

Just then there arose above the joyous clamour a loud screeching noise as though ten thousand pigs were being driven with ten thousand protests to some colossal market, and here was the cart brigade with the goods from St. Paul's, just returned from their journey across the American border; one hundred Red River carts, drawn by oxen in a long serpent-like procession, each of the two hundred axles giving forth a wailing screech that sometimes announced their approach before their dust could be seen.

The arrival of the men of the cart brigade at the same time swelled the throng and doubled the problem of the authorities. Each man that had anything coming to him had to be paid at once, though most of them were paid in advance and had worn out or drunk their wages long before the trip was over. However, each man was en-

titled to his "regal," a pint of rum, and when this began to be measured out, trouble was poured out with it.

For the next three or four days the fort was in an uproar. No business was transacted except the urgent business of keeping the voyageurs from killing each other. These merry, easy-going, hard-working fellows, perfect in the face of danger or tremendous toil, when freed from the discipline of the journey and under the influence of the Company's rum, became quarrelsome and dangerous. Old feuds were revived, old battles re-fought. The boat brigade was challenged by the cart brigade. Indians came in from all quarters to join the fray, and many of the new Highland recruits were in danger of their lives.

Chief Factor MacNeill had ever an alert eye upon his new officers, and he soon discovered that Apprentice Clerk Stuart had a strong influence over the men. He accordingly gave him some ugly tangles to unravel, which only the memory of all Waby-stig-wan had done for them on the journey prevented from developing into murder.

"You will make a great success at handling Indians some day, Mr. Stuart," the Chief said in his dry casual manner, and the heart of the new apprentice clerk swelled with pride at this his first commendation.

When the last staggering voyageur was at length persuaded to go shouting home, the fort settled down to its accustomed routine.

These first events in their new life made a profound impression upon the two fresh from the guarded ways of their old home. The easy, half-wild life, with its absence of convention, was dangerously alluring. Halliday's entertainments seemed less objectionable than at first.

"Halliday has a birthday, Ferguson says, every time anybody comes or leaves," Johnny McBain announced joyfully. "So we are likely to have a good time here. Hooray for Fort Garry!"

Unfortunately it was the season at which there was not much pressing work to do. The great business of receiving the furs from Indians and giving them their out-

'fits for the coming year had been finished in the spring, when they came to the fort with the results of their winter's hunt. Also the work of receiving the furs and provisions from the different posts of Assiniboine district, of which Fort Garry was the headquarters, was all over for the year. The work at present was the rather prosaic one of going over accounts in the office where Charles was employed. He soon began to grasp something of the great business of the fur trade, and learned to calculate in terms of beaver skins, buffalo and ponies. But there was plenty of idle time, and Satan might have found irreparable mischief to fill it had it not been for the action of the Bourgeois.

CHAPTER IX

Promotion

CHARLES had finished his work one afternoon and was helping Archie in the Indian hall. They were hoping to finish early and ride down to the Lower Fort. Charles had a secret mission besides. He was going to find that coulee again and see if there was any sign of the singer. Some instinct of caution kept him from even asking about the identity of the young lady, and in spite of much subtle questioning concerning every one in the Red River Settlement by the name of MacDonald he had so far met with disappointment.

He was busy, with the assistance of Richelieu, the interpreter, trying to help a tall, swaggering Cree to decide between a piece of scarlet cloth and a yellow belt.

"Take," White Wigwam was saying, pointing his long, brown finger towards the cloth, probably recalling his favourite squaw's warning. At this moment Old Geordie, the little terrier-like attendant of the Chief put his head in at the door leading to the stairway.

"The Bourgeois 'll be wantin' ye," he growled, regarding Charles out of the corner of his eye with his reproving glance.

Chief Trader Campbell stroked his long beard in silent amusement. It was well known that whenever Geordie was despatched from the Chief's office for any one he never deigned to come himself, but always sent an underling. Apprentice Clerk Stuart furnished the one exception. The old man carefully concealed a growing regard for the Young Chevalier under a specially snappy, doglike manner.

Charles hurried up the leisurely bargaining of White Wigwam, and ran across the square to the Chief's office.

The Factor was seated at his desk, driving through his afternoon's work. He was a thin man, with a nervous, worried manner. He was feeling the weight of a position which he was not big enough to carry, and lived in constant fear of insubordination on the part of those under him.

He glanced up with a genial nod as Charles entered. He shared the general opinion of the fort concerning this new clerk. The Young Chevalier had something of the charm of his royal relative joined with a frank honesty that made him a favourite everywhere. The Chief often looked him over as a carpenter might look over a piece of timber for building purposes.

"I wanted to see you for two reasons, Mr. Stuart," the Chief said frowning worriedly. "Mr. Halliday was to have taken these papers to Mr. Ross at the Lower Fort this morning, and I found them here after he had left. Mr. Halliday's five-year contract expires next New Year's," he continued irritably, "but he seems to have set the date a few months earlier. I should like if you would be good enough to ride down to the Lower Fort with them, please. You can ride, I see."

Charles admitted modestly that he could. "Then you may take Sally. She needs exercise."

This was indeed a great mark of his Chief's favour. Sally was MacNeill's own mare, a beautiful chestnut with a coat of satin, one of the swiftest buffalo-runners in the service.

"Now, about the other matter," the Chief continued, cutting short his clerk's thanks. "There has been one man less in the packing room for the past month. Turner had charge there, but I had to send him to Pelican Hill and he may not be back until after Christmas. I was wondering if you could find it possible to undertake the work. You have shown great ability in handling men and several of the fellows there have not been attending to business."

Charles hesitated. He had been warned repeatedly by Halliday against undertaking more than the specified

duties of an apprentice clerk. The work in the packing room was not included in the duties of an officer.

Here the goods brought by the boat and cart brigades were opened and repacked to be ready for distribution among the different posts of the district surrounding Fort Garry. The work was superintended by the officers, but was really done under one of the servants of the Company. It had been badly done under the easy-going Turner, a gay half-breed who fiddled and danced with his men and lived like the lilies of the prairie. For while the merry sons of the Bois Brule worked like giants on their trips, between voyages they were more inclined to ride out over the prairie with a gun than stay in the fort and work.

"Of course, you will not be required to do extra work without some remuneration, Mr. Stuart," the Bourgeois was continuing. "I shall see that you are properly rewarded when the Council meets next June and I have no hesitation in saying that it will also mean early promotion."

Charles agreed at once with great cordiality. He was very grateful for the chance indeed. What did it matter that the work lay outside his province if it meant more pay and swifter promotion? He was burning to be able to write to his mother and tell her that he was rising in the service.

"That will be quite satisfactory, then," said MacNeill rising. "You will find you will be glad you have undertaken it. I shall notify Mr. Campbell and you may go to him for instructions when you return."

Charles rode off down the prairie trail, his heart as light as Sally's flying hoofs. He was getting on already. Johnny McBain and Halliday were wrong. Hard work did count. He sang as he galloped along:

"O, Brignal Banks are wild and fair,
And Greta woods are green,
And you may gather garlands
Would grace a summer Queen."

CHAPTER X

Enter Madame Hawkins

BUT Brignal Banks, Charles discovered, were bare and chill and there were no garlands to be gathered and no Queen singing in Greta woods. He wandered up and down the deserted coulee, seeing nothing but scurrying rabbits. But he felt sure he would find her yet, and he rode back to Fort Garry against the keen prairie wind still singing.

Archie shared his joy completely over what they both considered Charles's promotion. But, to his surprise, his other companions in Bachelors' Hall received the news with derision, when they gathered in that uproarious place before the fire after supper.

Ferguson, who was the misanthrope of the crowd, plainly told him he was a fool.

"Two hours earlier in the morning and Saturday afternoons!" he groaned. "Don't be such a moonyass!"

"Why on the top of the earth do you want to get up in the middle of the night to serve the dashed Company?" Johnny McBain enquired in patient bewilderment. "You won't get a pound of tea more than your beggarly contract gives you, my lad, so take your Uncle Johnny's advice and quit."

"I have Mr. MacNeill's word for it," Charles retorted.

"Not his written word with the Company's seal," answered Ferguson ominously.

Charles was a little disturbed to find Halliday of the same opinion.

"Sorry to disappoint you, old man," he said kindly, "but I'm afraid there's nothing in this for you but more work. The cast iron system of this Company makes it

impossible for a fellow to be anything but an apprentice clerk on the poverty stricken sum stated in the contract. Five years of it too, at best! There's only one thing to do, muddle along as best you can for five years, and then 'March, Boy!' And that's what I'm going to do in a couple of months."

"There's only one way of getting promoted in the great and honourable H.B.C.," remarked Johnny McBain, rolling a cloud of smoke lazily towards the raftered ceiling. "Marry a dusky maiden; said maiden to be the daughter of a leading Chief Factor." He glanced slyly at Charles, and that young man glared back at him.

"There's one other way," drawled Ferguson. "Curry favour with the powers that be and all the other dogs who aren't so wise get kicked behind you."

Charles came out of his chair with a leap and was on top of Ferguson before the astonished group could draw breath. He caught the young man by the throat and hauled him onto his feet.

"Say that again, you coward," he hissed, shaking him.

Halliday and Ogilvie were between them at once, arguing, expostulating. Ferguson mumbled that he didn't mean anything, had been entirely misunderstood. But the affair drove away the pleasant atmosphere of the fire-side, and Charles went to bed hot and indignant and his generous heart sore. He hated making enemies.

He went on with his work doggedly, having perfect faith in the Chief Factor's word. He had to get out of bed at four o'clock in the morning instead of six, and go down to the packing-room to arrange the day's work before Sanderson needed him in the office, but he enjoyed the work. He liked the men, too, and as the Chief had predicted, he soon had everything going harmoniously among them.

It was well, indeed, that he was held down by hard work. Harry Erskine introduced the boys to Red River society, and Charles would fain have gone everywhere he was asked in the hope of meeting the lady of Brignal

Banks. Then there was another field of social activity always open to them. The Scottish and French half-breeds were extremely hospitable. There was always a dance at some Metis home, where the young officers were welcome, and once they were invited to a wedding in the Selkirk Settlement, where every one spoke Gaelic, and where the festivities lasted three days and nights.

So, while Halliday and Johnny McBain gave themselves up to a round of gaiety, Charles was forced, through pressure of work, to live a less frivolous life, and compelled Archie to do likewise, all of which was greatly in that young man's favour.

Halliday was the leader of the gay circle in Bachelors' Hall, and every event of the smallest moment in their rather monotonous lives was made an excuse for a celebration. Lacking any such excuse the young man could always produce a birthday celebration and reckoning by their number he must have long passed the age when the Company retired its officers.

Just before the long sunny Autumn days faded before the storms of winter one of Halliday's most festive occasions arose; the arrival for the last time in the season of the one lone steamer that several times during the summer came rattling and screaming its tumultuous way down the Red River from a post on the American side.

The *Prairie Queen* was a rattling, leaking, scarred, and battered copy of a Mississippi steamboat in miniature, and her noisy arrival at the fort with a cargo from St. Paul caused as great a stir as the home-coming of the York brigade.

Her skipper, Captain Hawkins, was a leathery Yankee with a vocabulary of profanity as long as the Red River. He was tremendously proud of his seamanship and well he might be for the voyages of the *Prairie Queen* were often attended by more dangers than ever Blake or mighty Nelson met on the high seas. He was always running on sand bars, for the Commodore, as his wife called him, disdained to turn aside for a mere shoal, and cyclones, hail,

rapids and hostile Indians were but minor details in the day's programme.

When the Sioux made navigation through the American country dangerous, the old Commodore still sailed. He turned the *Prairie Queen* into a man-o'-war, by piling the cordwood fuel as a protection against bullets, and inventing a marvellous contrivance, attached to the engine, by which a barrage of scalding water could be turned on at a moment's notice.

Indeed the Commodore, like old Mudjekeewis feared but one thing, and that was his wife. Madame Commodore sailed the *Prairie Queen* in the capacity of cook, by reason of a louder voice and a wider abusive vocabulary than her husband she was the virtual manager of the little steamboat.

One hazy autumn day late in October the *Prairie Queen* descended on her last voyage for the season. She came steaming down the river, the Commodore blowing his whistle at every settler's house and shouting, "Avast there, ye landlubbers!" He had stopped to drink a friendly glass with several of his friends along the voyage, and by the time he reached Fort Garry he was very merry indeed, and was marching his small deck and roaring out a nautical song:

"Blow, ye winds, I long to hear you;

Blow, boys, blow.

Blow to-day and blow to-morrow,

Blow, bully boys, blow!"

Charles was busy in the accountant's office and old Geordie, fearing he might miss the fun, came shuffling in to inform him of the arrival. Old Geordie was extremely careful to hide the fact that he was weak enough to have a preference for young Apprentice Clerk Stuart, so any attention he showed Charles was always covered by an unusual taciturnity of manner.

He stood with his back to the young officer, looking out of the window that commanded a view of the river.

"Ay, yon's the bit boat, ah see," he remarked casually, chewing his tobacco in an absorbed fashion. "An all thae fules fleein' doon the banks! Huh!"

"The boat?" cried Charles jumping from his stool. "Hurrah, I'm one o' the fules, Geordie, come along and be one yersel', man!" And the young man was out and away down to the river.

Halliday and the other young men were already there, and as soon as the cargo was off he took the three newcomers on board to introduce them to Madame Commadore.

"The lady is very partial to H.B. officers," Halliday explained. "She wants one for her daughter, Eily. Here's McBain who's always preaching, 'Never marry a half-breed girl.' You'd be the very one for Eily. She's pure white and looks like Mamma."

This was not very encouraging news for any prospective suitor for the daughter's hand; the mother was a tall muscular Amazon with a shrewd round face and a jolly Irish nose.

Halliday introduced each of his three new friends, with elaborate descriptions of their great wealth and high social standing.

"Sure and it's the foin-lookin' gentlemen ye'll find in the Company," she declared, wiping her hands on her apron and regarding Charles admiringly. "Don't anny o' yez go marryin' one o' them dirty half-breeds, now. Sure, there's hundrids o' foin-lookin' young ladies over in St. Paul's would jump at the chanst o' gettin' anny o' yez."

"Oh, what's the use of telling us that?" mourned Halliday. "There's no hope for any of us as long as the Commadore's above water."

The lady slapped him, shrieking with laughter. "Ah, ye young divil!" she cried, delighted. "Sure, I'll let ye have my Eily. She's workin' in a hotel in Georgetown, but she'd come down here."

Halliday hastened to explain that he wasn't a marrying

man, and that the others were all so jealous of each other it was no use to bring Eily among them for fear there would be murder. Madame meantime handed them a heaping plate of hot biscuits. She was an excellent cook, and to the bachelors of the fort her dainties were a great treat.

"If ever the Commodore should go to Davy Jones," Halliday promised, as the gang plank was removed and the *Prairie Queen* prepared to leave, "we'll get you an officer in the H.B.O. for your next, Madame, and we'll all live on flap-jacks and syrup for the rest of our lives."

Both the arrival and departure of the steamboat were occasions for a celebration on the part of the young officers. And far into the night Bachelors' Hall rang with their noisy mirth.

CHAPTER XI

Marie Rose Again

NEW YEAR'S DAY brought the great annual celebration of the Company. At the Upper Fort men and officers held high revelry, but it was down at the Lower Fort where the real festivities took place. There old Chief Factor Ross kept open house for a week, and his guests came from all over the settlement.

All the Upper Fort joined in the gaieties, and this year was to mark a special celebration; for Halliday was leaving shortly after the New Year opened, and invited all his friends to the Lower Fort to honour his last birthday party.

His five years' apprenticeship was over, and he was going home to finish the medical course he had so gaily cast aside.

"And don't you forget, old fellow," he confided to Charles, as they dressed for the festivity, "I'm going home to settle down. I've learned my lesson. There's nothing in this wretched service for a white man. You think you'll get on through hard work, but I doubt it. You can't get promoted here unless you marry into one of the ruling families. Cameron of Norway House and Ross down here, and MacKay of York Factory are all related by marriage, and they've formed a sort of Family Compact. They're trying to squeeze MacNeill out, too, because he doesn't belong."

"Well, why don't you marry one of them, too?" asked Charles, whistling "Brigal Banks," as he tied his new embroidered moccasins.

"Ah, why not? Because there's a lassie in Edinburgh waiting for me, my lad. Hurrah, where did you get that gorgeous sash?"

"Stole it," said Charles shortly.

"Old MacLean of Fort Erskine asked me why I didn't stay and get my commission," Halliday rattled on. "Why don't you get married, Halliday," he said. 'I'll give you Maggie.' I knew he was offering me my commission at the same time. I say, Stuart, don't marry a half-breed girl. You're tied hand and foot if you do. No more bonnie Scotland!"

"I won't," promised Stuart, and they ran down stairs whistling.

The big fort was alight with all the candles and fish-oil lamps that could be collected in the settlement, when the young officers from the Upper Fort, their dog-bells jingling gaily, dashed up to the door. The place was filled with a moving throng of gaily dressed, bearded men. On the floor, in the shade of the overhanging evergreens, sat the women and girls, the former with shawls over their heads and babies in their arms. The fiddlers, half-a-dozen of them, were mounted on a table playing madly, while some dozen other musicians, quite as expert, leaped and whirled around in the dance, awaiting their turn in the orchestra. The tide of dancers swept over the uneven whip-sawn lumber floor, their light moccasined feet making a sound like the washing of the waves of Lake Winnipeg upon the shore. It was a pretty sight: the girls in homespun, or the blue Hudson's Bay cloth, with fringed and beaded leggings, and embroidered moccasins of buff or yellow or white. The young men were quite as fine, in barbaric voyageur sashes, leggings of red or white, and soft, velvet-like shirts of deerskin.

Chief Factor Ross, a tall handsome man, with a long white beard and abundant silvery hair, received his guests at the upper end of the room. His half-breed daughters were dancing, but his wife was not present.

As his guests marched up to him, the first piece of hospitality offered was a drink; and after that the Fort was theirs to do with as they pleased.

Though there was a great deal of drinking, there was

not much drunkenness, for fortunately there was very little rum to be had before the free traders began to smuggle it in. But there was abundance of tea, and it was kept boiling day and night over the fire, and was strong and black and gloriously stimulating.

Most of the folk who came to the dance brought something with them to swell the delicacies piled high on the long table in the mess hall: beaver tails or buffalo tongues, or, most tempting of all, pickled bears' paws. When a whole family arrived with their dog sleighs, as often happened, they brought a quarter of venison, or some dozen geese and ducks, all cooked and ready to serve.

So there was very little trouble for the cook, who spent most of his time on the dancing floor. He merely saw that the fires were roaring in the big fireplace and that the tea was kept boiling.

When any one wanted something to eat he wandered into the mess hall, and helped himself from the cauldron of tea, and sitting on the floor satisfied his hunger either from his own bag or from some other person's donation. The entertainment was not a tax on the janitors either, for every one just rolled over in his blanket and snatched some sleep and wakened to leap again into the dance.

And so they footed it gaily night after night, for indeed there was no work to do. The coral isles set in the warm southern seas, where one eats bread-fruit and bananas off the trees, was but a poor place for a life of ease and pleasure compared to the Red River in those early years of joy. The Kildonan folk, those "bread and butter boys," as the meat-eating French called them, might have a sterner creed, and feel that man did not live by dancing and drinking tea alone, but during New Year's week everybody gave himself up to festivity.

As Archie and Charles stood looking about in absorbed interest, the fiddlers suddenly struck up a new tune. The six bows came down resoundingly upon all the strings. Every one leaped to the floor. The Red River Jig!

Laughing eyes, flashing teeth, lilted feet, answered the call of the magic tune.

Like many another voyageur chanson, the origin of that delightful, alluring, thrilling melody, called the Red River Jig, is lost. Perhaps some voyageur, wild with the joyous freedom of the rose-strewn prairie, and the silver flash of miles of lakes and river ahead, and yet yearning for his log cabin by the far off Red River, heard that melody in the song of the rapids and set his dancing fiddle bow to it. And that may be why it is so wildly gay with such an undertone of sadness.

They all danced it this New Year's night with every muscle of their lithe bodies, those boat-men who had danced it by every stream that roared between Hudson's Bay and the Arctic Ocean.

"Come along, get a partner," cried Halliday, as he tripped past, dancing opposite a nut-brown daughter of the Bourgeois.

Charles was wandering about looking eagerly for some sign of the girl of the coulee.

"We don't know how," he demurred.

"The beauty of the Red River Jig is that you don't have to know it," explained Johnny McBain. "You just get a partner and hop up and down in front of her, and the one who can keep it up the longest is the best dancer. Just snatch a partner, and dance the Highland Fling or the Sailor's Hornpipe, it doesn't matter."

Even though the two newcomers had felt secure in the unknown dance, the snatching of a partner was an untried ceremony from which they shrank. Remembering old days at home, Charles walked up to Marguerite Louise Richelieu, a daughter of the Fort Garry interpreter, and offering his arm, asked if he might have the pleasure. Mademoiselle Richelieu's pretty head dropped lower, and she made no reply. Evidently he had made a mistake; he bowed and apologised, and next tried a daughter of La Pierre, the York Brigade guide who lived at St. Boni-

face. The result was the same—'Toinette hung her head in silence. This was very discouraging. There was Archie hopping up and down industriously in front of a daughter of the fort blacksmith, and Johnny McBain was whirling away down the room equally well supplied.

Charles had decided that the fairy of Brignal Banks was not present, and was wandering about with a bored air when Halliday rescued him.

"You don't ask a girl to dance, you moonnyass. You just catch hold of her and pull her up on the floor. She doesn't know what you mean by crooking your arm at her that way. Watch me."

He marched up to Miss La Pierre and, catching her by the hand, swung her out on to the floor. Charles made a blind dash at the seated line of damsels, and caught up a buxom lass with shining black eyes, a broad, good-natured Indian face, and bright red hair, and away they footed it down the floor, as merry as the fiddlers themselves.

It was all delightfully easy after that. He and Archie danced their way down the long line of waiting maidens; the voyageurs leaped and whirled; the fiddlers sawed and whipped and banged their instruments; the smell of hot tea and boiling venison floated in from the mess room; the candles flashed above the evergreen boughs. It was glorious!

They soon learned another rule of the Red River dances. You must not keep to one partner too long. If you did, when you swung away from her in the mazes of the dance and swung back again, you were liable to find your place taken by a broad-backed voyageur, and you were, technically speaking, "cut out." It didn't matter, of course, for if there was not another available partner seated on the floor, you just slipped around and "cut out" some one else. Sometimes a young lady was induced to "cut out" a rival, should she dance too long with a favoured voyageur and then there was much merriment.

Charles was leaning against the wall, getting his wind

and talking to the Bourgeois, when his eye was attracted by a dancing figure far down the room. It was a girl, dressed in the dark blue that nearly all the half-breed girls wore, but she had a scarlet sash about her slim waist and a scarlet ribbon in her hair to match. And she danced like a leaf blown by the prairie wind. Her little feet in their white cabri-skin moccasins flashed in and out in perfect rhythm.

In a few minutes Charles was dancing again with the red-haired Amazon. He whirled away from her in the mazes of the dance, and when he whirled back he found, instead of her broad, good-humoured face, the dancing eyes of the girl of the white moccasins!

She laughed up at him, wild with joy. There was Marie Rose—the Marie Rose of the Hudson's Bay ice-field, gay and bright and beautiful! The music suddenly stopped, and Charles caught her hand and led her aside.

"Why, Marie Rose!" he cried in genuine delight. "How did you get here? Did the wind blow you over Lake Winnipeg?"

She was all shyness, now that the excitement of the dance was over. She looked down at the toe of her little white moccasin.

"I stay with de Ross girl," she said, with a gesture towards Margaret Ross who was passing with Archie. She glanced at his embroidered sash and smiled.

"See, I am wearing your beautiful gift for the first time," he cried. "And to think of meeting you! Tell me, what have you been doing since we left you at Norway House?"

But Marie Rose's feet were much more agile than her tongue, so they talked very little and danced a great deal. It was impossible for Charles not to be interested in anything so beautiful and joyous, and it was very plain to see that Marie Rose was very much interested in him. They danced together so much that the other young officers of the fort set themselves to "cut out" Charles, while Johnny McBain induced some of the girls to "cut out"

Marie Rose, and the dance became a gay battle to keep the two apart into which they joyously entered.

"Look careful, young man," warned Halliday, an hour later, when they met in the mess hall over a whole goose and two tin mugs of black tea. "If you dance any more with Marie Rose Cameron, old Murder will be arranging a marriage for you."

Charles felt the hot blood mount to his face. He resented Halliday's bluntness, and the spoiling of his innocent fun. Nevertheless the warning had its effect. He returned to the hall and, leaning against the wall with the older men, danced no more that night.

Marie Rose did not dance either. She sat on the floor with the oldest women, all the life and light gone from her, her face dull and heavy. She grew animated again when Charles came to bid her good-night. Would he be back to-morrow night? she stammered. Charles hesitated; he was not sure, he was very busy, but perhaps he would return. He took away a picture of her seated under a spruce bough, the flickering light of a fish-oil lamp on her face, gazing after him with longing eyes. Halliday did not return with them. He was free from all work now, and intended to stay till the last night when there would be more than tea to drink and the festivities would become uproarious.

Charles was sitting alone on Saturday evening in the accountant's office hurrying through his work. He had almost decided to return to the Lower Fort for the closing of the festivities. He was lonely and so was Archie, and the day had been very long and dull. The celebration would be at its height and Marie Rose would be there waiting for him. He drove his pen rapidly along the page, and was about to shout to Archie to order the dog team when the door was flung open and to his surprise Halliday strode in.

"Hello, what brings you home at this early hour?" he cried, and suddenly stopped, for Halliday was white and his eyes were red and haggard.

"What's the matter, old man?" Charles asked anxiously.

Halliday sank into a chair, leaned his elbow upon the desk, and dropped his head into his hand.

"I—I'm not going home," he said huskily. "Charlie, I'm—I'm married!"

Charles came out of his chair and put a hand on Halliday's drooping shoulder. He had never seen him other than gay and laughing, and the sight of this strange, broken Halliday was terrible.

They sat in silence for a while, and then the whole sad story was told. He had been gambling and drinking, his money was gone, and there was no hope of his going home this year. Chief Factor Ross had been very kind and had come to his rescue. Chief Trader MacLean of Fort Erskine was there with his daughters, and the two men had arranged things for him. He was to be taken on at Fort Erskine, and he would be given his commission in the spring. And of course this entailed his marriage with MacLean's eldest daughter.

Charles listened to it all, sick at heart. He was thinking, as he knew Halliday was, of the girl in Edinburgh who had waited so many years. The old Bible story his mother had so often told him of Kadesh Barnea, when the Israelites stood on the edge of the Promised Land and turned back into the wilderness, came vividly to his mind. Halliday had turned back into the desert.

Charles had nothing of comfort to say, but he got Halliday to bed and like the friends of Job, he sat beside him far into his night of agony, weighted down with his friend's woe, but speaking never a word.

CHAPTER XII

Kildonan

CHARLES awoke the next morning with a distaste for the whole world. He had left Halliday in the early morning hours, and had slept but fitfully himself. It had been his first glimpse into the depths of despair whither a young man might easily let himself sink in the lax, half-barbarous life of this wild country.

He lay under his blankets and stared up at the frost-covered window watching the vapour of his breath float through the cold room. It was Sunday and Bachelors' Hall was silent. Dufresne had not even started the fire in the huge Carron stove below stairs.

His troubled sleep had been filled with vague anxious dreams of his mother. The winter packet, the one mail from the outside world during that long iron season, had come down from St. Paul's a few days before, bringing letters from home. The pure strong influence of his mother's presence had been about him ever since. He slipped his hand under his pillow and drew out a sheet he had read hurriedly in the rush of the New Year's festivities.

"Last Sabbath we sang the thirty-first paraphrase at the morning service. You remember it: 'Supreme in wisdom as in power the Rock of Ages stands—' and I felt happy and comforted about you. Even when we sang on through that stanza that tells of the evil day that must come to us all I knew you would be safe:

'Art thou afraid His power shall fail
When comes the evil day?
And can an all-creating arm
Grow weary or decay?'

"And then there was that promise that He will give 'courage in the evil hour.' That hour may come to you, my laddie, but I am praying that you will have courage to meet it. Doesn't it seem strange that I should pray that you should have courage, when you led me such a life with your reckless daring? Ah, you were always so 'throughother' as Nannie says."

"The evil hour!" He had never guessed before what it might be. He had just seen one man meet it and go down under its subtle attack. He thought of other young men whom he had seen falling before temptation: gambling, drinking and greater and unnameable evils. He thought of easy-going Johnny McBain, who was drifting gaily with the current, of Archie, the faithful, who would follow wherever Charles led. And he, himself? He had forgotten that last promise to his mother, the promise to give his guardian angels a chance. He remembered that he had been inside a church only once since he came to Fort Garry, and that was when the kindly hospitable Bishop Anderson had asked some of the young men to a Sunday dinner.

Suddenly he leaped out of his bed. "This has got to stop right here!" he announced sternly to the chill basin of water as he splashed it all over his room. When he was half dressed he darted noiselessly into Archie's room and jerked the half-conscious youth into a sitting posture.

"Get up," he commanded. "Hurry, or we'll be too late!"

"Wha' for?" Archie blinked at him indignantly. "Get out! It's Sunday."

"That's the reason. We're going to church."

"To church?" Archie was wide awake now from sheer amazement. "What's the matter? Are you sick? There's no church near enough except the Cathedral. You haven't turned Papist, have you?" He drew the blankets about him firmly and lay down again. "And if you're going down to St. John's again to mumble over a lot of printed

prayers," he continued righteously, "well, you're going alone. That's all."

Charles finished his good work by hauling him out upon the floor, and departing with the bed clothes.

"You're going to Kildonan," he announced over his shoulder. "There's a real Presbyterian church there. We've lived like pagan Crees long enough. We are about to reform. I'll give you ten minutes to dress."

After a lonely breakfast begged from the cook as a special favour, they donned their capotes, tightened their belts, pulled their caps down over their ears, and set off on the trot they had learned when running beside the dog sleighs.

The fresh air and the exercise brought back the colour to their faces and the light to their eyes. Archie too, had been silently longing for something better. They were just two homesick boys running along the bleak banks of the Red River in search of the atmosphere of home.

The sunshine blazed on the snow and the air was like crystal, the sunshine as brilliant and the sky as blue as on any June day. They ran lightly past historic places, Old Fort Douglas and Sevenoaks, and across the narrow ribbon-like farms where Selkirk had settled his Highlanders. Long before they reached the church a bell in the tower rang out its invitation in a sharp crackling tone that told how frosty was the still air.

Kildonan church stood about six miles down the river from Fort Garry; the church for which the lonely exiles from Scotland had waited for forty years. It was only about ten years old, but John Black, the great prophet of the Red River, had been the shepherd of the flock for about fourteen years.

As the boys approached the church they slowed down to a decorous walk. No matter how biting the weather might be the Kildonan folk would not excuse strangers dashing up to their sanctuary in unseemly haste. The congregation was already approaching along the winding

river bank. There were a few low homemade cutters for the older folk and an occasional Red River cart, for the snow was not deep, but the majority of the people came to church on foot, the women and girls in their tartan or Paisley shawls, their warm homespun dresses and their snug bonnets; the men in their "hodden grey," or the Company's corduroy, and warm fur caps. In summer there were Sabbath blacks, when there were no big capotes to obscure their dignity, and there were silk hats, too, of wondrous height and ancient date, many indeed that had seen the great Selkirk and could have told stirring tales of the beleaguered settlement in the days of the two fur companies' feuds.

Sunday was a great day in the Kildonan settlement. It was not only a day of rest, and the Sabbath, when they met to worship their God; it was the day when they turned their faces towards Jerusalem. The church and its service, waited for through long weary years, was the one place where the new wilderness home resembled the old. Inside the Kildonan sanctuary, listening to their minister's ringing message, the exiles were home again, and saw the heather hills and smelled the salt breath of the Atlantic. For though many of them had been born under the kinder skies of the Prairie, and were immeasurably better off in this new rich land, they could all say with the poet:

"Though from the sheiling of the misty island
Mountains divide us and a waste of seas,
Yet still the blood is strong, our hearts are Highland,
And we in dreams behold the Hebrides."

Having passed the bearded patriarch who stood at the door with a thick club, to keep the dogs from entering the sanctuary, the two young clerks of the Company slipped into a chilly pew at the rear of the building.

The church was a wonderfully fine structure for the place and time. It was built of stone, reared at great

sacrifice and with loving and reverent hands. It would have been handsome and spacious inside, but for the low ceiling which the cold winters made necessary. For even the huge "box" stove, brought in by the Company, was taxed to keep the place warm, and the breath of the earliest worshippers rose in vapour to the low ceiling.

Archie leaned over to whisper that the old lady who had given them their first meal on the Red River was entering. Father and "the boys" were at home this time, for a splendid family of stalwart sons followed her bent figure in its gay plaid shawl. The church filled rapidly and every one was sitting silent, with reverently bent head, when Charles was conscious of a faint elusive perfume accompanied by the soft rustle of silk, just behind him. He was transported at once to St. Andrew's, and was following his mother's black silk draperies down the aisle of Holy Trinity, with the faint perfume of lavender floating back from her. He was overcome with a choking longing for her presence. He looked up and saw passing the end of his pew—the girl of Brignal Banks!

She was following an older woman down the church aisle, and was followed by a broad-backed, straight old gentleman who bore the unmistakable air of command that marked the chiefs of the Hudson's Bay Company. They passed into a pew, and Charles craned his neck to get another glimpse of a long shining curl that hung from beneath a dark beaver bonnet.

Archie whispered again, this time excitedly. "See that young lady?" and Charles, the wary, who was seeing no one else, whispered back:

"Which young lady?"

"Pshaw, there's only one; the Princess in the blue silk. That must be Miss Carmichael, the girl Carruthers is always talking about. Halliday says her Uncle, that old codger with her, keeps her locked in his cassette."

A stern bearded face turned reprovingly upon the whisperers from the pew before them, and the abashed young men were silenced.

The bell in the tower ceased its frosty notes, a hush fell over the congregation. The door of the vestry at the rear of the church opened and the minister came up the aisle. Black of Kildonan wore the long silk Geneva gown of his calling, but he also wore the buckskin moccasins of his adopted country, and he moved up to his lofty pulpit with a swift noiseless step that made him appear to float through the air, his broad wings outstretched.

As he stood up to announce the opening psalm, his prophet-like face was alight with the message that filled his heart. His keen, kind eyes lingered paternally upon his flock as he read the words of the psalm, his voice thrilled with their splendour:

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,
From whence doth come mine aid;
My safety cometh from the Lord,
Who heaven and earth hath made."

The Kildonan congregation remained seated to sing and stood for prayers as their fathers had done before them. The precentor stood up in his box, twanged his tuning-fork and held it to his ear, searched up and down the scale for the key note, found it and chanted the first line. The tune was Gainsborough, that grand old anthem, with its slurs and slides and trills so dear to the Scottish heart.

The precentor's voice had scarcely ceased when, like the spring tide of the Red River, which, joined by the Assiniboine, comes thundering down to Lake Winnipeg, the Kildonan congregation, with one voice, poured forth its flood of song. Slow, solemn and stately, the mighty tide flowed on, the prairie exiles lifting their hearts upon it to the God of their fathers, who had led them out into the wilderness and had ever gone before, a pillar of fire in the night of their distress.

"Thy foot he'll not let slide, nor will
He slumber, that thee keeps . . ."

Charles sang thus far when a terrible tightness in his throat stopped him. Archie was frankly wiping away the tears and not even attempting to sing.

And then, strange, awesome chance, when the minister gave out his text what should it be but the very words of his mother's farewell:

"The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

The sermon was one his mother might have chosen. It was delivered with Black's own prophetic fervour, a sermon that could not fail to lift the hearts of young and old up from the sordid things of life to the hills of God where dwelt their aid and their safety. There were two sonorous words which he sounded forth again and again, "Salvation" and "Damnation," rolled out with a splendid Scottish inflection; the two great issues of life, a hope and a warning to all his hearers.

The hospitable folk made the lads welcome as they stepped out into the keen, biting air of the prairie. Their old friend of the bannocks and cream, who proved to be a Mrs. McRae, wife of one of the elders, received them into her arms again and bade them come and visit her early in the week.

The two boys lingered at the door in spite of the cold, for the girl had not yet appeared, and nothing could drive Charles away until she did. She came out at last, tripping down the icy steps, daintily holding up her skirts.

The two young men stood gazing up at her, as one gazes after a long winter, at the first hepatica of spring. She belonged to their world; she seemed a fragrant part of the old home they had left.

She looked down at the two young officers from Fort Garry. Archie's slim, smart figure, she passed over with a gentle bright glance, and her eyes fell upon the Young Chevalier. There sprang into them instantly a look of glad recognition; then the blue eyes drooped, she gave a shy smile, and just a little nod, and Charles was standing uncovered as if before royalty.

The girl turned swiftly to assist the elder woman down the steps, and the burly man who accompanied them held out a hand to each of the young men and welcomed them to Kildonan church. He followed the two ladies to a waiting cariole and they drove off down the highway.

Charles noticed with relief that Mrs. McRae had taken Archie's attention again and he had apparently missed the gracious little nod. He wanted to keep that first meeting sacred. It belonged to something far removed from the commonplace events that were gossiped over around the fire in Bachelors' Hall.

He could hardly tear Archie away from the church door, for Betsy was introducing him to a bevy of Kildonan girls, and he was fairly blossoming out before their charms, under the biting prairie wind. They got away at last, and Charles ran up the snowy trail to the fort as though on the wings of the wind. He had found her again! And she had remembered him. The Young Chevalier and Flora MacDonald!

And though he was not yet conscious of it, he had found something else that morning in Kildonan church; something infinitely precious.

The little hamlet of Winnipeg village which was already growing up around the walls of Fort Garry, was very quiet, but across the river in St. Boniface, the settlement of French half-breeds had dined and was making merry. The gay Metis had all attended service in the Cathedral in the morning and now shouts could be heard from the river bank where the happy populace were having dog races. From the homes near the fort came the sound of scraping fiddles and shuffling feet.

Everything was very quiet about the fort when the two ravenously hungry young men came running through the gateway. A few men dozed around the fire. Halliday had gone to the Lower Fort, Chief Factor MacNeill was not to be seen. The Bourgeois always raised the flag in the square on a Sunday morning, and feeling he had

thus paid sufficient deference to the day, he slept all morning and spent the afternoon at work in his office.

After dinner, the few remaining gathered about the big stove in Bachelors' Hall. Johnny McBain grumbled good-naturedly at the two who had been to church. What sort of moonyasses were they, anyway, to go half-way across the continent to church when there was St. John's just at hand? One service was just as dull as another in his opinion.

"Good boys!" from Dr. Gordon. "I never used to miss a sermon of Mr. Black's when he came here first; but—" he looked about him, searching the clouds of smoke for an excuse—"but—well—I seem to have gotten out of the way of going to church. I must start again. I suppose you saw the Kildonan Princess?"

"Of course they did!" cried Ferguson. "I've no doubt that's what they went to church for. I suppose Uncle Murray was there, on guard as usual, like an old sheep-dog ready to leap at any one who looks at his one ewe lamb."

"She's a very lovely young lady, and Murray is wise to keep an eye on these young wolves in apprentice clerks' clothing." The doctor paused and shook in silent laughter at his joke.

"It'll be no apprentice clerk she'll marry," declared Ferguson gloomily. "Old Murray will see to that."

"Old Murray will do as Miss Carmichael says, in that regard," declared the older man. "When the time comes to choose a husband, she'll do it herself. Miss Flora will make a curtsy, like Beatrice, and say, 'Father, as it please me!'"

Charles sat smoking, his eyes on the fire, saying nothing but listening with all his might.

"Who's this paragon of beauty and independence?" asked Johnny McBain sending a column of smoke slowly to the raftered ceiling.

"What, you don't know Miss Flora MacDonald Carmichael of Kildonan?" The old Doctor tilted his chair

back and placed his feet upon a bench. He dearly loved to give out information to these all-knowing young apprentice clerks. "Miss Carmichael is a daughter of old Murray's only sister, and she was born away back in Canada somewhere. Eh, I remember well the day she and MacDonald's wife landed here from St. Paul's! Miss Flora was a golden-haired fairy of sixteen and Miss Douglas was a beauty of twenty-three. Governor McTavish himself met them and it was like the arrival of Governor Simpson when he came tearing into a post headed by his piper."

"Get on with the story," advised Archie who was drinking in all this information about charming ladies with great zest. "Who's Miss Douglas?"

"Haven't you heard the story of Miss Alice Douglas, and how she came out here to marry Chief Trader MacDonald? Ah, that's the great romance of the Hudson's Bay Company! MacDonald doesn't belong to the Family Compact, be it said under your breath, and so he doesn't get promoted very fast, though he's one of the greatest men in the service. Well, he had been looking for his Chief Factorship for years, expecting when he got it to go home, for there was a young lady waiting for him in Inverness. But the last year of his long wait, when he fully expected his promotion, he came down to Norway House, and found there was nothing for him. Instead, he was sent away off to Lake Athabasca to take charge there. It looked as if it were all up with him and the lady; but what did she do but pack up and come out to him? Yes, sir!" The Doctor's chair came down upon all fours in the excitement of the story. "There's a woman for you! The Company's ship wouldn't bring her, of course—against the rotten rules; but my lady came round by St. Paul's, and up with the carts. And the Sioux were on the war-path too. She had a sister married back in Canada and they met her there and came out with her. But, by Jove, you know, that girl would have gone alone through the Northwest Passage if Mac-

Donald had been at the other end! He came down with the Athabasca Brigade to meet her at Norway House. They were delayed by an accident in the Crooked Rapids on Athabasca River, a nasty place, and the bridegroom was nearly late. Miss Douglas' boat was just coming up Playgreen Lake full sail, when they came round the bend, and MacDonald stood up and yelled at the men, and there never was such a race since the days of Governor Simpson. But the Athabasca men got there first. Trust them, with MacDonald on board. They knew all about the lady and were as anxious as he was. And he was standing on the shore to meet her when her boat came in. And they were married that morning in the little church at Norway House. Man, it was great!"

The old Doctor took out his red Hudson's Bay handkerchief and wiped his eyes. "If any of you lads has a lassie waiting for you in the old country, see that you keep true to her," he finished up, with a keen glance at Charles. "Look at poor Halliday," he muttered.

There was silence around the stove for a few minutes. Charles was aching to ask what Miss Flora Carmichael had to do with the story, but fortunately Archie asked for him.

"Oh, Miss Douglas brought her out to Murray from Canada. This,—what was his name, now?—Kennedy and his wife, Miss Douglas' sister, knew her well back there in Upper Canada. Her parents both died and left her, and Murray sent for her to come out here. He sent her to school for a couple of years to St. Andrew's and since then he's kept her housed where stray young apprentice clerks can't get an introduction." He chuckled, "He's a lad, is retired Chief Factor Murray. He used to be one of the great men of the service and he keeps a hand on everything yet, let me tell you."

He arose, stretched his arms and yawned. "I think I'll take a nap, and I'm glad you boys went to church. Just keep it up—I always used to go, but somehow I got out of the way. I must start again."

From that day there were no more regular and devout attendants at Kildonan church than the two new apprentice clerks from Fort Garry. Though there might be some question regarding their religious zeal, there could be no doubt that they were held closer to their highest ideals by this weekly turning towards the things that are eternal.

For Black of Kildonan preached straight to the heart and conscience; and the souls of the Scottish lads responded to his message. And so, although Charles did not know, his mother's prayer was being answered. One of the Angels who had been given charge over him to keep him in all his ways had taken up his station, a stern Angel, holding up the flaming sword of righteousness to keep the gate of any forbidden garden wherein his soul might stray.

CHAPTER XIII

Dining with the Princess

RETIRED CHIEF FACTOR MURRAY'S big log house facing the Red River, on the edge of a deep coulee, was a very comfortable and cheery place on this bleak January afternoon. Beside the open fireplace the parlour had the unusual comfort of a big stove which had been brought down from the States by Commodore Hawkins. The Murray home boasted a piano, too, the first one in the Settlement outside the young ladies' schools. There was a large mirror above the mantelpiece in a handsome gilt frame, a carpet with a large rose pattern, and several pictures on the walls.

The ladies of the family were seated with their sewing by the open fire, their backs kept warm by the stove, as they waited for the Chief Factor to come in for his tea.

The head of the house was a powerful man in the community and his family were of consequent importance in the Settlement. Like many of his brother officers of the Company, he had contracted in his early days what was known as "a country marriage." His wife was the daughter of a chief of the Plain Crees, with a faint strain of French blood. His numerous family had grown up in the service and had all been successful. His sons held high positions in the Company's service, and his daughters had all married men of importance.

As the King of Denmark was said to be the father-in-law to every court in Europe, Chief Factor Murray might have been termed father-in-law to the Hudson's Bay Company. So, though he was retired, he still kept his eye on the wintering partners, and it was said that no man was promoted in the service without his sanction.

When his Indian wife died and his children were all

settled he went home to Scotland and married a lady of about his own age, intending to end his days in the old home. But he soon found himself longing for Rupert's Land. The old proverb that if a man once tastes of the Red River he must always go back to quench his thirst was true in his case. In the Red River Settlement he was a great man, a power in the land; at home, in Inverness, he was but a private citizen. So he was soon established once more on the prairie, his wife with him.

She, poor lady, had never been beyond her native land, and seldom beyond her native parish and the new wild land proved a desolate habitation. The Chief Factor, himself, was one of its many hardships. He had been accustomed to perfect submission on the part of his womenkind, and his wife's gentle spirit gradually drooped in the bleak climate of his dominion.

And then Flora Carmichael had come, and everything had been changed. To the lonely woman the girl had come like the blue anemones on the prairie after a Red River winter. Her gay, bright presence and her constant love and devotion turned the gloomy old house by the coulee into a real home.

Murray had received their unknown niece with some fear. She had been brought up in Upper Canada and he had never seen her, but her mother had been his only sister and he owed her a home. So he had sent for her, and soon he was willing to confess that life without her would be very drear indeed. She was a young woman now, and already he could see that her marriage would bring him more power.

She did not look at all the submissive sort, as she sat by the fire this winter afternoon, her golden head held erect, the sparkle of her blue eyes and the firm set of her chin all speaking a character of firmness and determination.

Her aunt, sitting opposite in her arm-chair, with her gentle timid face and her thin shrinking shoulders made a complete contrast to the girl's radiant forcefulness.

In a corner on a low hassock sat Adelaide Simpson, a granddaughter of Chief Factor Murray. Her home was in a Company post on the far western prairie and she was attending a young ladies' school at Red River, in training to be, one day, the wife of a Company officer herself.

Adelaide knew all the gossip of the community and her week-end visits were always something of an event in the quiet lives of the other two ladies.

"Marie Rose Cameron she want to stay at de school all winter," she said in her soft Indian voice with a pretty French accent. "But my Uncle Cameron he sent for her and she gone back to Fort Verandrye. Marie Rose she very bad girl to run away to de dance at de Stone Fort."

She laughed softly, a deep shaking laugh, and her big black eyes closed with merriment.

"She stay at Fort Verandrye for Chris'mas wit' her sister, Isabella, an' she pay ole Bateese to bring her down wit' de dog sled to de dance—one hun'ed mile, so she dance wit' Apprentice Clerk Stuart. Dey run off in de night, Ole Bateese an' Marie Rose, an' now my Uncle Cameron, he say he will marry her to de blacksmi' at Fort Hearne if she not go back to York an' marry Chief Trader Robinson."

Adelaide laughed again.

Fort Hearne was one of the Company's last and most hopeless outposts, far down on Great Slave Lake, in the Mackenzie River district. Adelaide could afford to laugh. She knew her worth and the worth of Marie Rose Cameron. They did not need to be sent to such outposts like some girls.

Flora Carmichael gave a little shiver. There was something rather dreadful in this talk of a husband being picked out for one, as Chief Factor Cameron was picking out one for his daughter.

"Marie Rose did not like the Old Country school, did she?" she asked in attempt to change the subject.

But Adelaide was not to be diverted from such a pleasant topic.

"Oh, no, an' she will not like de school here either. She want to come down to Red River to be near Apprentice Clerk Stuart, because dey were los' togedder on Hudson's Bay. De Ross girl say he dance an' dance wit' her at de New Year ball. An' he likely marry her if my Uncle Cameron not send her back to marry Chief Trader Robinson."

"Flora, dear," said Mrs. Murray in her soft complaining voice, "that is the second time you have shivered. Please tell Frances to run upstairs for your shawl."

The girl patted the thin wrinkled hand in her aunt's lap. "No, no, thank you, dear. It was Adelaide made me shiver with her talk of arranged marriages. If any one tried to arrange a marriage for me!" She sat up very straight and her blue eyes sparkled.

The half-breed girl gazed at her in wonder and admiration mingled with fear. Flora's independence was something she could not understand. It was much better to have one's marriage arranged for one she felt.

"Anna Ross say dat my Uncle Cameron will make Apprentice Clerk Stuart a Chief Trader and den he can marry Marie Rose," she said comfortably.

Flora jumped from her chair.

"Hush, hush, Adelaide! I cannot bear to hear you talk so about marrying. It isn't right."

Adelaide laughed softly and her aunt looked up at Flora in surprise at her vehemence. The girl sat down to her sewing, her cheeks aflame, as though she were ashamed of her sudden outburst.

The door opened and the master of the house entered. The two girls rose, and Adelaide, with lowered eyes, dropped her grandfather a pretty curtsy. She was very much afraid of him and from the moment of his entrance her tongue was dumb.

The Chief Factor was not in a very genial mood, though he was always polite in the presence of the ladies. The winter packet had come down from Norway House, along the bleak length of Lake Winnipeg by dog sled, and

it had brought what he considered a very weak and foolish letter from his friend, Chief Factor Cameron. He wanted to know something about young Apprentice Clerk Stuart of Fort Garry who had come out last year from the Old Country.

It appeared that this young man had saved his daughter's life when they were nearly carried away by the ice in the Bay, and it also appeared that he had something to do with Marie Rose's refusal to remain in York Factory to be married on her return home. Cameron would like to know something of the young man and his prospects, and asked if Murray would take the trouble to meet him and also to enquire about him from MacNeill.

Retired Chief Factor Murray grunted. These were evil times, surely, when young women set themselves up to say whom they would or would not marry. He would soon have settled Marie Rose's case had she been his daughter.

When Chief Trader Simpson wrote down from Edinburgh House on the far reaches of the Saskatchewan asking for a wife, he had merely announced to his daughter Margaret that she should go with the Saskatchewan Brigade in the spring, and Margaret had gone and no more about it. And so had he settled all his daughters' matrimonial affairs, and so should he settle Flora's when he had made up his mind that he had found a suitable match for her. He had no patience with Cameron's weakness.

"Well, young ladies," he said, taking the arm chair which was placed near the fire for him. "What do you say to a dinner party? We haven't had one for a long time. Do you think your school mistress would let you out long enough from your lessons to attend one, Adelaide?" he asked, giving the girl's ear a little playful pull.

Adelaide smiled and said, in a whisper, that she hoped so, and Flora clapped her hands joyfully. "How lovely! Adelaide and I were just longing for a party. But please

let it be somebody young. Don't have *everybody* over eighty, Uncle Malcolm."

Adelaide drew a great breath. It was always a source of wonder and awe among the young relatives of the stern old man, that Flora said and did what she pleased in his presence.

Her uncle looked at her, struggling in vain to make his glance stern. "You are a very impertinent young person. Have I been in the habit of inviting octogenarians to my parties, indeed?"

Flora laughed and gave the Red River shrug.

"Well, this time I promise you some children like yourselves. What do you say to Friday, my dear?" he asked, turning to his wife, but not waiting for her to give her opinion. "We shall have Sanderson and his wife from the Upper Fort and Dr. Gordon, and those two young men who come down to church so regularly. I think they ought to be encouraged. One of them is named Stuart, and the other one, I think, is Sinclair."

Adelaide's lowered lids fluttered. She raised them, and her big black eyes flashed a message to Flora, but Flora's eyes were on her work and the rose colour in her cheek deepened to crimson.

The Chief Factor drank his tea and sat staring into the fire with lowered brows. He was hospitable and liked asking his friends to dine but he did not enjoy being a party to another man's weakness.

"Young ladies are altogether too prone to set their wills up against their elders in these days," he declared, speaking his thoughts without reference to the conversation. "When your mother was a girl, Adelaide, young women did as their fathers told them." Poor Adelaide was overcome with fright. She was not conscious of having disobeyed any one; but felt she must be guilty of some crime.

Flora, the daring, came to her assistance. "They do yet, in all but one thing," she said, remembering poor Marie Rose and her troubles.

"And what is that, may I ask?"

"Flora, dear," whispered her aunt. The girl always kept her in a state of terror by her reckless challenging of the old man, but Flora laughed and looked him straight in the eye.

"In the choice of a husband, of course."

"In the choice of a husband, indeed!" he cried, striking the arm of his chair with his heavy fist. "And that is just where a girl is wrong. If any young woman under my care"—he looked at her meaningly—"dared to set herself up against my opinion, do you know what I would do?"

Poor Mrs. Murray tried to signal to the reckless girl but she paid no attention. "I think I could guess what you'd try to do," she said. "But do you know what I would do?"

She set her cup down on the table and sprang to her feet, laughing and unafraid. "Just suppose, Uncle Malcolm, you should come striding in some day when Aunt Murray and I are at tea, striding in as fathers do in this country, and say"—she lowered her voice to a deep growl, imitating the Chief Factor's manner to perfection—"Hah, there, Flora! Here's Chief Trader Hamish MacSporin at the door with a travois! He is starting for Mackenzie River at once. Get on your bonnet and marry him immediately!" Now, what do you suppose I'd say?"

He sat up straight and glared at her for a moment; but, as always, he gave way. His face relaxed and he barely escaped a smile. He threw himself back in his chair.

"It would be something confoundedly impudent, I'll wager, you hussy!" he growled. "Now, go and play and sing us something, and see if you can behave properly."

The girl laughed aloud, and danced over to the piano. Adelaide stared in amazement, and Mrs. Murray heaved a sigh of relief. Once more the danger was past. But she knew that some day these two would surely disagree, and then the house of Murray would come to destruction.

But meanwhile her husband was laughing to himself, and Flora, her voice thrilling and triumphant, was singing:

“O, Brignal banks are wild and fair,
And Greta woods are green;
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English Queen!”

“Well, this is quite beyond my comprehension, me whatever,” exclaimed Dr. Gordon when he delivered the invitation to the two amazed and grateful apprentice clerks. “I don't pretend to understand it. Promiscuous young men are never invited to the house of Murray now that Miss Flora has grown up.”

Whatever the cause the two young men were humbly grateful for their invitation and one of them was rapturous. Poor little Marie Rose's sad face, as he had seen it last under the spruce boughs in the flickering light of the candle, and her long cold journey back to Fort Verandrye were completely forgotten, and Charles went about his work whistling “Brignal Banks.”

When they came downstairs dressed for the dinner party in fringed shirts, embroidered sashes and beaded moccasins, they made a very brave showing indeed, and the old Doctor sighed for his lost youth as he surveyed Charles Stuart's six feet of splendid young manhood, from the waves of his shining hair to the embroidered toe of his new moccasin.

Ferguson arose, his hand on his heart and made an elaborate bow, while Johnny McBain walked around Charles in exaggerated admiration, singing:

“As he cam' marchin' up the street,
The pipes played loud an' clear,
An' all the folk came rinnin' out
To meet the Chevalier.
Oh, Charlie is my darling, the young Chevalier!”

"I don't understand how you fell into such luck," grumbled Ferguson. "I know Miss Carmichael will be disappointed when she sees it's you instead of me. The old fellow's made a mistake, or else Doctor's lied about it."

"Put in a good word for your humble friends," cried Johnny. "Everybody knows that old Murray makes most of the promotions in the Service. Tell him there are two brilliant young men up here wasting their ponderous talents in the paltry pastime of apprentice clerks, and threaten him with our resignation if we don't get our commission next June."

The two young men buttoned up their capotes against the biting wind, and with the Doctor comfortably tucked into the cariole they ran beside their dog team down the prairie trail in the pale gleam of the shifting Northern Lights. Charles ran with winged feet; humming whenever he jumped upon the sleigh for breath:

"Oh, Brignal banks are wild and fair
And Greta woods are green."

The square log house near the river in its snowy frame was glowing with many lights when their sleigh dashed up to the door.

Flemmand, the half-breed servant, resplendent in new shirt and moccasins, with hair oiled and curled, announced with much ceremony:

"Doc-tare Gor-daw, M'sieu Stuar', M'sieu Seenclair."

The Chief Factor was standing near the door and received his guests heartily. He never enjoyed himself more than when he was dispensing hospitality to a houseful. He had a cordial greeting for his old friend, Dr. Gordon, and he made the two young clerks welcome, bending a keen glance upon the taller one.

Another dog-sleigh had jingled up to the door, and more guests were pressing in behind them. They moved on to where Mrs. Murray, in her black silk, with its faint

perfume of lavender, received them listlessly. She showed some slight interest in Charles.

"From St. Andrew's? Indeed, I must have met your mother," she said brightening. "She would not remember me, though," she added with a sigh. "It was the year before her marriage, and she was still at your grandfather's, the Reverend Doctor Bruce. She was a very beautiful girl, and your father was there." She smiled reminiscently. "I remember they called him the Young Chevalier."

"And that's what they call you, too, isn't it?" whispered a voice at his elbow, and Charles was looking into the laughing blue eyes of the girl of the coulee. He could not have believed that anything could look so beautiful.

Flora Carmichael was possessed of an ordinary share of good looks, and the beauty that comes from youth and perfect health. But to Charles, accustomed to the dark Indian and half-breed girls, and surrounded by the magic of her name and their romantic meeting she seemed the loveliest thing he had ever seen.

She was dressed in a shimmering sky-blue silk, her golden hair was piled high on her stately young head, and a cascade of curls fell from the shining heap far down her back. Her starry eyes were a deeper blue than her dress, and there was an unmistakable welcome in them.

"Yes, and I've found who Flora MacDonald is," he said breathlessly. "I hunted down every MacDonald in the Red River Settlement, and all to no avail."

Here Dr. Gordon made the unpardonable mistake of interfering. He seized his two protégés and piloted them around the room introducing them to every one, as was the hospitable Red River custom.

They were summoned to the dining-room presently by the stately half-breed servant. Charles found himself leading out Adelaide Simpson, while the Princess floated away with some one who, he was thankful to see, was stooped and bald. The dining-room seemed a wonderful sight to the two strangers. To sit down to a white table-

cloth itself was an event. And there was carpet under their feet, and the table glittered with glass and old blue delft and a few pieces of shining silver. And, wonderful fortune, Charles found the Princess opposite him, where he could catch the sparkling glance of her blue eyes.

Adelaide refused to either speak or look at him, so he was able to give his undivided attention across the table. There were many interesting people at that board, had he been able to listen to them. The minister of Kildonan himself was sitting at the right hand of the hostess and opposite sat a man who had helped in the search for Franklin. There were men who were leading the affairs of the little Colony, whose names were to shine in her history and in the annals of the whole country, and the conversation was all of great events of its history that had once seemed like fairy tales to him.

Dinner consisted largely of meats and fowl. Flour was still at a premium on the Red River, and vegetables were scarce. But the table was laden with roast goose, duck, prairie chicken, buffalo boss, beaver's tail, and every other delicacy the Red River Settlement afforded. There was wine, too, and Dr. Gordon grew very merry under its warming influence. He became the life of the table and gave an amusing imitation of a meeting between a new Governor of the Company and old Chief Kenowas, of the Plain tribes.

"You go back home," Kenowas advised. "You too green. You moonyass. McTavish, he know."

The lady to Charles's right was little Madame Sanderson, the wife of the chief accountant, and she was rendering her end of the table very gay by describing her efforts at making a Christmas pudding. She was one of those young ladies, wrongly designated by that very broad word half-breed, which was given to any one who had a strain of Indian blood, no matter how thin. Madame Sanderson's mother had been a half-breed. She herself was the daughter of a French trader, and had been educated in a convent of Quebec.

"It was all de fault of my dear frien', Madame Macdonal'," she was explaining with many pretty gestures. "She make me take de receep. And I put in de raisin, and sugare, an' all de spice. An' she say boil heem in de hot watere, but she not say boil heem in a clot'. A clot'! How do I know dat de Scottish ladies cook a clot' wit a Christmas pudding? Absurrd! So I not use de clot' me, I put de pudding into de hot watere, as my frien', Madame Macdonal' say, and Ciel! it all turn to rab-biboo!"

She threw up her pretty hands, rings flashing, eyes dancing.

As they all grew more and more joyous, Dr. Gordon stood up to propose a toast to the Queen, foot on the table in the true Highland fashion. The host was by this time grown exceedingly genial also, and when the Doctor was carried away by his own oratory, Murray reached out and gently transferred the foot to a dish of stewed kidneys which the man-servant had placed on the side of the table.

The Doctor was too absorbed to notice, until he felt the cold gravy oozing through his moccasin and realized his situation. The address ended in roars of laughter, amid which the ladies rose from the table.

In the drawing-room there was a glowing fire in the grate, and an extra cordwood stick had been crammed into the Carron stove.

When the gentlemen entered little Madame Sanderson was at the piano, playing brilliantly, her rings flashing. Then she sang a couple of gay little French songs and when she had left the piano, some one asked Miss Carmichael to sing. As she moved towards the piano Charles managed unobtrusively to be there to help her find her music.

"What kind of songs do you like best?" she asked.

"Scottish songs, of course, and 'Brigal Banks' is my favourite." She looked at him and they both laughed.

"I wondered that I could never see you again," Charles said after a little silence.

"I knew all about you," she said, "and how you saved Marie Rose on the ice. That was splendid."

The colour dyed Charles' face. He did not like to hear this girl coupling his name with Marie Rose.

"They made altogether too much of it," he said. "And she saved my life as well."

"Come, Flora," said her uncle, "I thought you were going to sing for us."

The girl moved away quickly to the piano.

"Give us something Scottish, Flora," said Mr. Black. "Something of Scott, or the immortal Rab."

The girl sat down to the piano and opened the faded old book with the picture of the thistle on the cover. The rose on her cheek deepened, but she held up her head and sang:

O, Brignal Banks are wild and fair,
And Greta woods are green,
And you may gather garlands there,
Would grace a summer queen.
And as I rode by Dalton Hall
Beneath the turrets high,
A maiden on the castle wall
Was singing merrily,

O, Brignal Banks are fresh and fair,
And Greta woods are green,
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English Queen."

It seemed impossible to get another word with her. The minister of Kildonan was very much interested in the young men from the fort who were always in church and he spent a half-hour with them, and invited them to his hospitable home. Then Charles was taken away by the host into a quiet corner where Murray asked him so

much about his work and his prospects, that he was highly flattered, and filled with secret wonder.

Then Archie whispered to Miss Carmichael that Charlie could play the fiddle, and as nearly every house in the Red River possessed such an instrument, the hostess had theirs brought out. Little Madame Sanderson came back to the piano to accompany him and in a few minutes old and young were pushing back the furniture and the party ended up with a reel.

Charles did not step on the sleigh once on the trip back to the Fort. He ran all the way up the snowy trail, as light and fleet as the flying dog team. And this time he would have been the first to recognise the presence of a guardian angel in his life, though he did not at all realise the great work she was to do.

Though neither of the young people guessed her high office, she had already taken her place on guard: another of his mother's angels, and one who was to be a stay and support in a time of strain and stress.

CHAPTER XIV

The Coulee

JUST as soon as they might call with propriety Charles and Archie ran down to Chief Factor Murray's to pay their respects to the ladies. To their dismay they found that the Chief Factor had driven down to the Lower Fort that morning, taking his niece with him, and they were compelled to sit with Mrs. Murray, and listen to the poor lady's longings for Edinburgh and her descriptions of all she had suffered in the winters by the Red River. They appeared to find her very entertaining, however, for they lingered by the fire, listening in absorbed attention until it was so late they had to leave, unless they intended to stay for dinner again without an invitation.

They were invited to many other places for dinner after that, but Charles was always disappointed at not meeting Flora again. She went about very little. The gossips said her uncle was afraid of her meeting impecunious young men. She was to make a great marriage some day.

The New Year brought many changes in the fort. Halliday was transferred to the Lower Fort, and early in the year Johnny McBain was sent out on the bleak prairie to take charge of one of the winter posts.

It was a drear lone place, a post opened only in the winter and spring, but important as a point to which the Indians could easily come in the spring with their furs. Poor Johnny rode away with a half-breed servant one bitter day, cursing the Hudson's Bay Company from factor to trapper, and his place was taken by a relative of the Bourgeois who came up from Norway House with the winter packet.

With the first signs of spring Fort Garry awoke to

tremendous activity. Hunters and trappers began to come in to the fort with their furs to be bartered against last winter's supplies. From the wide stretches of Assiniboia district the outlying trading posts sent in their carts with their harvest of furs, and the voyageurs and the freighters who went out with the cart brigade began to gather.

Every one from Chief Factor to servant worked at top speed. MacNeill drove himself and every one ruthlessly.

Outside the fort wall the conical lodges of the Indians began to spring up, although most of the hunters lived in the open without any shelter whatever, stretching out beside their fire at night, and sleeping under the skies whether they sent moonlight or rain. The old fort became a joyous bedlam, men and women, dogs and children swarmed under the wall and entered the enclosure. Night and day there were singing and laughing, dancing and drinking, horse-racing and gambling and always an uproar of howling fighting dogs.

Before the furs were ready to be taken to the coast they were beaten in the yard, to take all the dust and dirt out of them, and packed into a huge fur press. There was a constant sound of banging, laughing and shouting as the cleaning process went on.

The Indians moved about either entirely naked or draped in gay new blankets, red or green, or white sprinkled with vermilion powder, and all wore elaborate feather headdresses. Boats and canoes came sweeping down the rivers, carts came creaking in across the plain from the outlying districts, laden with furs and pemmican and dried meat.

The Company's business was built up on a vast system of credit, and the whole country was in its debt. So the furs brought in one spring had to be checked off against the hunter's debt of the year before, and another debt contracted for nets, ammunition, blankets, tea, tobacco and finery.

Charles was so busy that he had not time to even look

towards Kildonan, till one day, much to his joy, the Chief sent him with a message to the Lower Fort, giving him Sally to ride.

He galloped away down the King's Highway, the black gluey road that followed the river behind the settlers' houses. He was full of high hopes. Not since the dinner party had he seen the Princess, except at church, and not regularly there. He was determined that he should see her this time if he had to ride up to the old Factor's door and boldly ask for her.

It was a flawless spring day, too early for green grass or buds, but on every side streams laughed and leaped on their way to the river, and there was promise of birds and flowers in the balmy wind and the warm fragrance of the damp earth.

Charles had a brief visit with a quiet, subdued Halliday, and transacted his business with a briskness and despatch that won the admiration of the Chief Factor. The Bourgeois little guessed what was the mainspring of his energy this afternoon.

He was mounted and riding back in a very short time, but he had not gone many miles before his speed slackened. He drew up at an old log bridge where the highway crossed a little stream. Here a driveway ran off the road and up to the door of the Chief Factor Murray's house. A path turned to the left and followed the stream down into the coulee. Charles turned Sally's head towards the path. He might have the great good fortune to meet her here again.

The little stream brawled and scolded its way to the river, the soft glow of the sunlight glancing upon it. In the depths of the ravine a White Throat was pouring out his little song of love and longing. Charles halted in the shadow of a willow clump to listen. Perhaps it was the same instinct that stirred in the heart of the little singer that made him whistle softly the tune of "Brigal Banks."

He paused to flick a fly off Sally's satin coat, the first

of the season—a troublesome herald sent out to announce the tormenting horde that would soon follow. Then he sat with the whip lying against the mare's flanks, as though changed to an equestrian statue, his whole being taken up with listening, for up from behind the screen of willows and hazel bushes that covered the pathway came a sound of singing. It was the song he had just been whistling, soft and thrilling:

“O, Brignal banks are wild and fair,
And Greta woods are green,
And you may gather garlands there
Would grace a summer queen.”

Charles leaped from his horse and, taking his bridle over his arm, hurried down the pathway, along the bank of the creek. The song ceased suddenly; there was no sign of any one in all the long green aisle winding down to the river. He stood and listened again, the shadows of the bare branches playing over his face. The path forked here to the right and left, and he did not know which way to take. Then he took up the song where it had been dropped:

“If, maiden, thou would wend with me
To leave both tower and town . . .”

He paused, listening with all his might, and there it came, much farther away, down the right-hand path:

“Thou first must guess what life we lead,
That dwell by dale and down. . . .”

He ran down the path whence the voice came, Sally's trotting hoofs making a most incongruous commotion. The coulee narrowed here, the pathway disappeared, and the trees and bushes were so thick he could lead Sally no farther.

Through a break in the tree-screen that bordered the top of the coulee he could catch a glimpse of the substantial log house where Flora lived, a column of smoke rising from the low chimney. He waited a moment, then sang a little louder:

“And if thou canst that riddle read,
As read full well you may,
Then to the greenwood thou shalt speed
As blithe as Queen of May.”

Still no reply. The little White Throat, who had fled far down the ravine from his rivals, took up his interrupted song once more, and the woods rang with his call.

Suddenly, from the open space where the house appeared, there sprang a small, brown object, uttering sharp, impatient yelps. He was in desperate haste, as though he had just escaped from prison. His short legs fairly walloped the dead leaves of last year as he leaped down the bank. He flew straight past Charles and darted around the thick hazel bush beside which he was standing, bursting into a storm of joyous barking.

Charles leaped after him, and there, was the singer, her eyes laughing, her face flushed, her bonnet off, and all her golden hair ruffled by the branches and shining in the flickering light.

“Oh,” she cried, “you bad Burk! How could you be such a traitor as to tell?”

She caught up the little dog and gave him a playful shake.

“Good dog!” cried the Young Chevalier, patting the little dog’s satin head. “He must be the good genie that reveals the fairies when they are hidden.”

She stepped out into the path, adjusting her bonnet and shawl.

She smoothed Sally’s sleek flank. “What a beauty she is!”

“She belongs to the Bourgeois. He lets me ride her sometimes.”

"Then you must be a wonderful rider, or Mr. MacNeill would never let you have his Sally. He likes you, though," she added, glancing sideways at him, her hands caressing Sally's flank. "He told my Uncle Murray that you are one of the promising young men of the service."

Charles felt a rush of grateful warmth towards the Bourgeois for commending him in such an important quarter. He was already amply paid for all the extra work of the past winter. He could not think of anything more to say for the wonder of being with her here alone in the woods. She was silent, too, suddenly afraid that she would forget about Marie Rose.

"I must go back to my garden," she said breathlessly. "I have been planting sweet peas. I ran down here to look for crocuses, but it's too early."

"When shall I see you again?" he asked wistfully. "I missed you last Sunday. People should attend church regularly," he added piously.

They both laughed at that. "And you were away when we called," Charles complained. He waited for an invitation to come again, but there was none. Her eyes looked troubled. "We—my aunt—is not very strong, and we live so quietly," she faltered.

"Do you come down into the coulee often?" he asked, with deep cunning.

"Sometimes; I like this little grove because it reminds me of Strathnairn, my old home in Upper Canada."

"Perhaps you may be down here to-morrow?" Charles asked breathlessly. "I often ride down here on Saturdays. I hope to to-morrow."

There was a tremulous question in his voice.

She felt herself yielding. She was forgetting all that Adelaide had told her about Marie Rose Cameron.

"Sometimes I ride down to the Stone Fort on Saturdays too," she said. "But I'm never sure." She hesitated and finally added, "And often my Uncle comes with me."

She turned and walked up the pathway, Charles following, with Sally's bridle over his arm.

They moved very slowly, but they reached the edge of the bluff, and her home stood out against the sky, the windows aflame in the setting sun.

"Why, Burk, we'll be late for dinner," she cried. "Good-night, Monsieur Chevalier."

Charles wanted to walk with her to her door, but knew he was dismissed. He stood and watched her across the level sward, and then he leaped upon his horse and rode back to the Fort, his heart as light as Sally's flying hoofs.

CHAPTER XV

"Black Cloud"

BUT when next Saturday came Charles was riding westward far across the prairie behind a couple of high-wheeled, slow-moving, shrieking Red River carts. Every spring the chief accountant and his assistants visited the outposts of the district to make up their accounts for the year. Sanderson had gone off in one direction and had sent his apprentice clerk in another. Charles had two half-breed servants with him, the carts were filled with merchandise for a couple of posts and were to come back filled with dried meat and pemmican for the voyageurs.

They jogged away over the brown, wet prairie, crossing streams and rounding sloughs, and making their meals out of what they shot by the way to supplement their dried meat and pemmican.

Under other circumstances the expedition would have been a delightful change after the confinement of his winter's work; but at present Charles wanted to go nowhere except down the western bank of the Red River.

His two comrades, Louis and Pierre, were old friends of the York Factory Brigade. They were a jolly pair, always singing, laughing and playing pranks on each other. Every night after they had boiled their tea and eaten their pemmican, Louis would fish out an old buzzing mouth-organ from his pocket, and Pierre would take down the tail-board of the cart and dance the Red River Jig till it was time to roll up in their blankets under the carts.

They met bands of Indians journeying to the fort with their year's spoils; the lordly hunter riding ahead smoking, his squaw carrying the load, or attending to it

strapped, papooses on top, to a little travois drawn by a pony. The Company's men were always greeted cordially with, "Ho, Boy," or "Where you goin', Boy?" And they were never allowed to pass a lodge without an invitation to come in and eat.

The first post to be visited was a lonely shanty called Piapot's Creek, situated on low-lying ground beside a small river. As they approached it, Charles left the lumbering carts to follow and rode down ahead.

Piapot's Creek had an ill reputation for flooding the low lands along its banks, and this Spring it had done its worst. The water had subsided, but around the low log shanty lay a sea of thin mud and water. It presented a desolate scene as Charles rode down from the heights above and floundered through the mud to the door.

There were just two signs of life in the place: four wolfish-looking dogs which came yelping at the stranger, and a solitary man, standing motionless in the mud, leaning against the door-frame. The dogs barked vociferously, but the man remained immovable, regarding the approaching rider from under the brim of his ragged cap.

Charles dismounted, balancing himself upon a sort of causeway made of firewood. The figure at the door was ill to look at. He was incredibly dirty, with a spotted face and a ragged beard. His trousers were rolled up to his knees and his bare feet were sunk in the mud.

"May I see the officer in charge, please?" asked Charles. The ragamuffin took his short pipe from his mouth.

"Sir," he replied, straightening up and striking himself on the breast, "in me you behold the officer in charge of this important post of the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company. I am the lord of this demesne.

'My manors, halls and towers shall still
Be open at my Sovereign's will
To each one whom he lists, howe'er
Unmeet to be the owner's peer.'

Pray roll into my pig-sty. You are, I presume, one of the latest litter of apprentice clerks."

"Johnny! Johnny McBain!" Even in his amazement and dismay, Charles was overcome with laughter. He leaned against the rickety paling and shouted. Then the boys met in the mud and shook each other in a very spasm of joy. "It's like heaven seeing you again, old Chevalier," Johnny McBain said, when he could speak.

He pulled his guest inside the log shanty, shouting for the half-breed servant to come and prepare dinner.

The mud inside the building was still about six inches deep, and as thick as pea-soup, but planks had been laid across to a ladder which led to the loft above. Johnny showed the way up, and they sat on his bed under the low sloping roof.

"We lived up here for two weeks, Jerry and I," he said. "There was one advantage, we had a bath tub in the place for the first time. All one had to do was to go half way down the ladder and swim off. I expected every day the floods would carry us off and that we'd go sailing triumphantly into Fort Garry holding the furs above our heads to keep them dry, faithful to the Company even in death!"

In a short time the half-breed servant brought up a meal of wild duck; the carts arrived, and down below there were sounds of revelry where the three men disported themselves in the mud.

Over their dinner Charles told all the news of the Fort: Halliday's low spirits, Sanderson's growing dignity, a dinner-party at the home of a settler, a Kildonan wedding at which the festivities lasted three days and nights, and poor Johnny listened his eyes filled with longing.

Then he told of his meagre doings, the monotonous round of his lonely life broken only by the flood that nearly ended it all. One other event had happened. A hunting party from England, under the guidance of the great James MacKay, had halted at his submerged doorstep. The visitors were anxious to see everything about

a Hudson's Bay trading-post, and had insisted upon a visit. Johnny stuck imaginary eyeglasses upon his nose and went through a pantomime of a certain great Englishman's astonished inspection of the pig-sty, until the rafters of the shanty rang with the guest's laughter.

"But it's a dog's life," he said finally, growing serious, as they smoked their pipes after dinner. "When I think what I left behind for this, I wonder how I keep my sanity. My father lecturing in St. Andrew's University, and his son living in this hole. And what do I get in return? I am graciously permitted to sell tea and tobacco to greasy savages, I am housed like the swine, and I am invited to take my gun and go out and shoot rabbits when I'm hungry, all for a salary a draper's clerk would sneer at. The only way to keep alive here is to get drunk as often as possible, and stay that way as long as possible. The only way out is to marry some half-breed girl belonging to the reigning house of the Hudson's Bay and get promoted. And it was MacNeill sent me here," he continued resentfully. "And his relatives are all getting the comfortable jobs. More Family Compact! MacNeill has the very marrow of a tyrant in his bones, Charlie. You're his favourite just now, but look out, he'll squeeze the last ounce of strength out of you, and if the worm dares to turn he'll smash it."

Charles's sympathetic heart longed to say something cheering. Some of his mother's last letter returned to him, "Courage in the evil hour," that was what she most desired for him. He told Johnny something about it, haltingly, shyly.

He left his old friend cheered and comforted. "I have only two more years to put in," Johnny said, as he bade Charles farewell at the gate, "and then I'm going home, to clean my father's boots if he'll let me. Good-bye, old chap, and keep an eye on your ponies, the Sioux are wandering about."

Spring had fully come by the time Charles turned his horse's head towards Fort Garry, and the green prairie

was spangled with blue "orchids," the windflowers of the west; the messengers to tell him that Flora would be out in the coulee. The poplar bluffs along the rivers were green, the creeks and the sloughs were framed in violets, and the "prairie smoke" uncurled its little rosy-brown blossoms. Charles, riding ahead, sang "Brignal Banks" at the top of his lungs and hurried the carts so fast that even good-natured Louis was moved to complain.

"Dat M'sieu Stuar', he mak de jomp, lak jackrabbitt."

Coming down through a well-wooded bluff they found the first signs of the Sioux against whom they had been warned. Six bodies, scalped and decomposed, lay in the valley beneath, poisoning the air.

"De Stony, dey keell heem," Louis explained, as they hurried past. The Stony or Assiniboine Indians did not permit these foreigners from across the American border to remain long in their territory.

They camped that night on the edge of a wide coulee where the wooded banks produced an abundance of dead willows for their fire. They had shot plenty of ducks and Louis cooked them expertly over the fire. While Pierre was attending to the ponies, and Louis to the supper, Charles took his gun and wandered along the wooded height, looking for larger game. Wild-cats abounded in these wooded river-bottoms and at this season were a great delicacy, tasting like spring lamb. As he stood on the top of the bank he could see far down the flat river course, where the stream, a silvery thread, was winding and twisting between low sandy banks, far eastward towards the Red River. As he gazed his eye was attracted by the sight of some moving objects far down on the flats by the river side. It was too far away to distinguish them and Charles's heart leaped; perhaps they were buffalo. He slipped back into the grove and, running back, whistled for Pierre, then returned to his out-look. The first sight told him they were not buffalo, but human beings, but their actions seemed very strange, some were lying about, others appeared to be crawling on their hands and knees.

There was always danger from "Free Traders," of whom many were unscrupulous men who came across the American border. They, with wandering "bad" Indians and the fire-water they always traded, were a menace to the Company and to the whole country. Charles's first thought was that these were a band of Indians and traders in a drunken orgy; but Pierre's keen vision settled the matter.

"None trader, master," he announced, after a brief look, "Sioux."

The country had been visited this spring by bands of Sioux refugees from the United States, driven in terror before the vengeance of the settlers after the dreadful Custer massacre. They were generally in a starving condition, having neither ammunition nor fishing nets, and the Crees, being in mortal terror, fled before them. So the Company's horses had often fallen victims, and the Company had made a virtue of a necessity and always gave the poor wretches food and the means to get more.

Pierre had been reconnoitring and came back, stealing along the edge of the bluff farthest from the invaders.

"Dey teeve," he announced; "steal our horse. We go camp on Old Man's Bluff."

"But they're starving, Pierre," Charles declared, still gazing intently at those of the poor creatures who were able to move, crawling about on their hands and knees and picking the buds off the bushes.

"Yah, dey starve," replied Pierre quite satisfied, "we go Ole Man's Bluff for camp. Dey eat our horse."

"Pierre, you're a stony-hearted heathen," asserted the young master.

"Get Louis and a couple of ponies and we'll ride down and take them some food, and we'll get some more waxies on the way," he commanded.

Pierre shook his head. He had a terror of the Sioux, even in a state of starvation. They would kill the three of them in no time, he argued. They would have arrows and shoot them and then steal the carts. Sioux were all

bad, and, anyway, Louis could not speak to them nor understand them.

"Dey no spik at all, altogedder," he grumbled.

Charles silenced him, and as Louis was ready to ride wherever Waby-stig-wan rode there was no more to be said. Leaving the carts and some of the horses, the three, mounted and armed, and with their fresh game and some pemmican, rode along the ridge and down into the coulee.

As they came out into the open, the able-bodied among the party, recognising the Company's outfit, came staggering up the slope to meet them, yelling like famished wolves.

Charles had learned from hearing Campbell discuss the Sioux bands that the fact must be impressed upon them that the Company was presenting them with voluntary gifts, and to be wary lest they get the idea that they were compelling the offer, and as the starving creatures came clamouring round him, he urged upon Louis this necessity.

Louis was more than equal to the occasion. He represented the Company as Omnipotence and the White Headed Master as a special heaven-sent messenger to bring them relief. The poor creatures could scarcely wait till his harangue was over. Some of them were too far gone for food. The others grasped at what was handed them and tore at it like famished dogs.

When every atom had been devoured, Charles seated himself on the ground, the Indians in a circle before him, and, giving a pipe and tobacco to the Chief, "Black Cloud," they talked over matters. This was part of the troublesome band that had stolen horses from the Company's forts all along the border. With Louis interpreting, he reasoned with them. If they would send men to Fort Garry, which was not so far away, the Big Master there would give them fishing nets and ammunition. Then they must either bring furs to the Company or return to their own country. But above all they must not touch the Company's horses. They were now in the land of the Great Company, the land where the great White

Mother ruled. The Company had treated them as brothers. Was it gratitude, did they think, to take the horses of their brothers? He went on dwelling on the gratitude they should show the Company, Louis interpreting, the gaunt old Chief listening intently. He understood a few words of English and watched Charles when he spoke as carefully as he watched Louis.

Black Cloud began to look puzzled, and at last he turned to Louis. "The Big Master," he said haltingly, "speaks often of gratitude. What is it? Is it something to eat?"

Charles gave up the argument there. These poor starving children were in no condition to be harangued. They must be fed or given the means for their support. He made Louis repeat carefully the promise to Black Cloud that if he would send to Fort Garry he would see that they were looked after, and leaving them with fishing nets to keep them from starving in the meantime, he returned to his camp. But they journeyed many miles farther before they stopped. It was not safe to camp near the Sioux, lest they find themselves in the midst of a raid of the Stonies. And the next morning they were up and away long before the sun looked over the red rim of the prairie.

CHAPTER XVI

The Outlaw

BACK to old Fort Garry again! Charles galloped joyously down the southern bank of the Assiniboine towards the old grey walls and towers of the place that had now come to be home.

The *Prairie Queen* was lying near the shore just arrived from her first voyage of the season. The men were taking off her cargo, but there was none of the joyous shouting and uproar that generally accompanied the Commodore's presence. When the scow had come to take the carts over Charles heard the reason. The brave old Skipper had run his last trip on the Red River and had gone on a voyage far out on an unknown sea.

As soon as Charles had reported at the fort and been rejoiced over by Archie he ran down to the vessel to see Madame Hawkins. He found her sitting in her little cook's galley wringing her hands and loudly lamenting the Commodore's passing.

He had been ill all winter, and she had begged him not to take this trip, but he could not bear to think of the *Prairie Queen* taking the shoals and sand bars of the Red River without him. And so he had come, and just as they were leaving Pembina, his hands had dropped from the wheel.

"An' sure, he'd been cursin' that young Divil of a Jimmy LaTour jist the minit before, jist as foine an' aisy as iver, an' I sez to mesilf, I sez, the ould rascal's goin' to hould out for another ten year. An' the next minit he was gone, an' here I'm left a lone lorn widdy woman!" She broke into a loud wailing again, rocking to and fro and moaning. "Sure what's to become o' me an' me pore Eily, an' her so far away!"

Charles tried to comfort her, and finally succeeded so well, that he left her drinking a cup of tea and contemplating a second venture into matrimony.

"Troth, an' I'll niver see the loikes o' him again," she declared, with a heaving sigh. "But if iver I marry again it'll be wan o' the Company's men I'll be havin'."

"We won't forget that," Charles promised. "The first good match we see here at Fort Garry we'll send for you."

With this assurance for her future and the hope of a relief from her lonely widowhood, Madame Commodore sailed away back to Georgetown, and it was under undreamed of circumstances that Charles's promise to her was fulfilled.

Chief Factor MacNeill and some of the other officers had left for the great annual Council meeting of the Company's chiefs at Norway House. Charles was a little disappointed that he had not seen the Chief to remind him of his claims before he left, but his natural optimism soon dispelled any fears on that score. He had a much greater disappointment awaiting him, however. Retired Chief Factor Murray had gone to visit his daughter, who was married to the Chief Factor of Winnipeg House, far north on Lake Winnipeg, and had taken his wife and niece with him, and the coulee and all the Red River banks were left desolate.

The spring rush of work was over and the summer was quiet. Charles had little to do, and had plenty of horses to ride, but what was the use of a horse when Brignal Banks were desolate.

Archie and he rode much together nevertheless. They swam and paddled on the river, went shooting and fishing, and all the while Charles was dreaming great dreams of what might happen when the result of the Council meeting was known. He would be able to write to his mother to let her know how well he was doing and she would be so proud. And, who knew, perhaps some one else would be proud too.

The Bourgeois returned with news of many promotions

and Bachelors' Hall was in great excitement. Halliday's was the first to be announced. He had been given his commission and departed for his new post west of Lake Winnipegosis in the Swan River District. His good fortune was the subject of many jeering remarks but no surprise was felt. Halliday had a powerful father-in-law. The chief accountant was another who had received honours. He too had been made Chief Trader.

"His relative position will be so far removed from ours," Ferguson remarked, as they sat up on the parapet of the fort wall in the evening, and tried to smoke the mosquitoes away, "that he won't know what an apprentice clerk is. Probably he'll think it's some kind of small animal the Indians eat."

As they feared, his honours had gone to the chief accountant's head.

"There'll be no more of this confounded 'Sam' Sanderson," he confided to Charles. "I am going to see that Campbell addresses me as Chief Trader Sanderson. Considering our relative positions—"

He was interrupted by Campbell, who came striding into the office.

"Hello, Sam Sanderson!" he cried heartily. "Congratulations! Hear you've received your commission."

Charles waited anxiously for news of his own fate. MacNeill was tremendously busy, and rumours floated through the smoke of Bachelors' Hall that all had not gone well with him at the meeting of the Council. He was not one of the Family Compact and there had been trouble between him and Cameron, it was whispered. When Governor McTavish returned no one knew what might happen.

In the face of all these rumours Charles hesitated to press his own claims, but the opportunity came the week after the Chief Factor's return. Sanderson had sent him over to MacNeill's office on an errand, and when the business was transacted, Charles ventured:

"I have been wondering, sir, if you had any news for

me regarding my work for the past year. I thought perhaps there would be some settlement of my case."

"Your case?" the Chief regarded him with impatient enquiry. "What about?"

Charles experienced an uncomfortable sinking sensation. "You promised, you remember, that if I took charge of the packing-room it would mean either early promotion or extra pay. I have done it for eight months now."

The Chief Factor's brows came down.

"It's obviously impossible that we could give our attention to such trivial details at a meeting of the Council," he replied curtly. "What is the matter? Are you not satisfied with your work?"

"I am not complaining, sir. I was merely reminding you that you asked me to undertake some special work for you last Autumn, which you said would be amply paid for."

MacNeill stared at him. "Young man," he said, leaning over the desk and tapping it with his long, lean fingers, "have you read your contract? How much does it call for?"

"I know that it says twenty pounds the first year, but—"

"And how much the second year?"

"I know what my contract calls for, sir," replied Charles, the blood coming up hot into his face. "I am not talking about that. I am talking about the verbal contract you made with me for extra work, Mr. MacNeill."

The Bourgeois' eyes flamed. "I made no contract with you, sir! You are here to serve the Company and you are being paid as other clerks."

Charles stood up. "Then do you mean to tell me I am not to have any recognition of the fact that I have done twice the work the other clerks of my station have done?" he demanded.

The governor shoved aside some papers with a weary

air. "Please spare me your heroics, Mr. Stuart, and use your energy on reading your contract."

Charles went back to his work hot with rage and indignation. He found that all his friends had news of his disappointment before he had a chance to tell it. Old Geordie, who according to his unfailing custom, had listened at the key-hole of the Chief Factor's door, and who was as full of rage as Charles himself, had lost no time in communicating the ill news. All were sympathetic, and even Ferguson declared it was rotten. Chief Trader Campbell, while he was very sympathetic, was calm and judicial.

"It's what I expected," he said, as they strolled down by the river in the cool evening. "It's a pleasant way the Company has of rewarding special efforts. One has to work for the sake of the work well done. It has often to be the only reward. *'Pro pelle cutem'*—it's the Company's motto."

"I told you you were a fool," said Ferguson, but his voice and manner were more sympathetic than his words. "The Moonyass should listen to the Old Timer."

"Well I shan't be a fool any more," announced Charles. "I'll give him skin for skin if that's what he wants. I'm done with everything beyond what my contract calls for."

He went to bed that night with the firm determination that if the Chief Factor ordered the fort burned down over his head, he would not get out of his bed a minute before six o'clock, the hour when the other clerks arose.

"You needn't call me in the morning, Dufresne," he said to the shuffling brown janitor, as he mounted the echoing stairway to his hot room, "I am not doing the work in the packing room any more."

"Bien, m'sieu, who I call up, den?" asked that factotum, ejecting a large fountain of tobacco juice out upon the darkened prairie.

"I don't know who has been appointed to it," replied Charles calmly. "Possibly the Bourgeois will tell you."

Charles appeared at the regular breakfast the next

morning, for the first time in many months. It had been necessary heretofore for him to breakfast alone. MacNeill glanced at him under stormy brows, but made no remark until the meal was ended.

As he was leaving the mess room the Bourgeois beckoned him. "Mr. Stuart, will you step into my office for a minute, if you please?"

As soon as the office door closed behind them, the older man turned upon him.

"What do you mean," he demanded with an oath, "by lying in bed and neglecting your duties this morning?"

Charles felt himself on solid ground here. "I have not neglected any of my duties as apprentice clerk, sir," he answered calmly. "Our work commences at seven o'clock. I shall be in the office at ten minutes to the hour."

MacNeill rose from his chair. The apprentice clerk was taller by a couple of inches than the Bourgeois, and it was difficult to harangue with sufficient dignity a culprit to whom one was compelled to look up. He struck the desk with his fist.

"Let me have no more impertinence from you, sir! Your hours are mine to set as I please! You will be down at the packing room to-morrow morning as usual, or I'll know the reason why."

"If you can show me that the packing room is an officer's duty I have no more to say. But I will do no more than the work of an apprentice clerk."

MacNeill's face grew white. He feared insubordination on the part of his officers more than a Cree uprising. He had a dread suspicion that the young fellow could prove himself in the right, and he determined to crush the rebel summarily.

"If I hear any more of this from you," he said in a whisper, "I will make you rue the day you defied me. I give you one more chance."

The next morning Dufresne, stepping softly as the kindly old fellow always did in the early hours, came into

Charles's room with his usual, "M'sieu Stuart! Lève, lève, m'sieu!"

Charles raised his head. "What do you mean by prowling round here, Dufresne? Didn't I tell you that I wasn't to be called early?"

"De Bourgeois, himself, he tole me."

"Well, you go and waken him," said Charles recklessly, "and tell him you made a mistake."

Very much mystified, Dufresne padded away downstairs and out towards the Chief Factor's house.

Dr. Gordon arose and came stalking into Charles's room like a blanketed chief, to counsel discretion.

"I'd do it if I were you, Charlie," he begged. "MacNeill won't be here much longer, and there's no use running your head against a stone wall when you can go round it. He has the power to grind you to powder, lad-die, and he'll do it. Come, up with you, and away."

But Charles was not to be moved by either friend or foe. Old Nanny used to say of him, when he was a little fellow, "The wean's jist like a poker when his bit back's up," and it was up now and immovable.

In the midst of the old Doctor's pleading he was forced to beat a hasty retreat, for the sound of leaping footsteps was coming up the stair. Charles sprang from his bed and slipped the hook that locked his door, and the next moment the acting Governor of Fort Garry was thundering upon it.

The whole upper floor of Bachelors' Hall was wrapped in a slumbrous silence, and nowhere was it so profound as in the room he was assailing.

MacNeill lost what shreds of dignity he had left. He pounded upon the door till it threatened to give way, and shouted anathemas, all of which failed to disturb the peace within. Then, muttering curses, he beat an enraged retreat. He had made himself ridiculous before his subordinates he well knew, and he promised himself a deadly revenge.

As Charles expected he was summoned to the Chief's

office after dinner. Archie followed him to the door, whispering encouragement, and Campbell gave him a word of advice.

"Don't bite off your nose to spite your face, lad. He'll not be here long. Take your medicine."

But the young man went in to his doom with a set face.

The interview was long and stormy. MacNeill blustered and cursed and browbeat his clerk furiously, until goaded to desperation Charles turned upon him. For one wild instant he was in danger of striking a Chief Factor, when a merciful intervention occurred. No stretch of any one's imagination could picture old Geordie, with his hairy dog's face and squinting eyes, as an angel, but surely his office was angelic this morning. His grizzled head had been pressed against the key-hole during the interview, and at this crucial moment he opened the door unceremoniously.

"Maister Stuart's wanted in the store," he announced without haste.

Charles turned blindly, realising what he had been saved from. He strode out of the room still hot and raging. MacNeill arose from his seat and turned in fury upon the cause of the interruption.

Old Geordie was a servant of long standing in Fort Garry, and a privileged one. Not even Governor MacTavish had dared take liberties with him. He responded to the Chief's onslaught of abuse right gallantly, thrust for thrust.

The storm ended by MacNeill's ordering Geordie to go and bring Charles back, and by Geordie's ordering the Chief to go to a certain place of much warmer temperature than the Red River. And then the blow fell, and old Geordie, the faithful servant of many years' standing, who had welcomed Governor Simpson to Fort Garry and paddled for the great MacKay himself, was dismissed from the service and ordered to leave the fort.

When Charles returned to the office, Chief Trader Campbell sent for him, to reason him into yielding.

"You don't know what you're doing, lad," he warned. "He's angry enough to do anything, and a Chief Factor once put a fellow in irons who defied him."

"Very well, let him," answered the Young Chevalier, unmoved.

"I don't think there is any danger of imprisonment here in this civilised region, whatever might happen in an isolated post," Campbell continued, "but he will send you to Siberia. You will be shoved round from one lonely post to the other, and your prospects will be ruined."

But Charles could not be moved, even while he was very grateful to his friend for his good intentions.

The elder man arose and was walking up and down the floor in deep perplexity when Archie burst in with the dire news of Geordie's fate. Charles was far more distressed by this calamity than his own.

A council of war was held at once, and a deputation of Campbell, McMurray and the Doctor was appointed to wait upon the Chief the next morning and intercede for the old man. They were careful to make no reference to the cause of the quarrel, but merely pleaded for clemency.

MacNeill was not as hard to deal with as they had supposed. He was, in truth, just a little ashamed of having turned the old man out, and was afraid there would be a reckoning for him later. But he could not have insubordination, either in servant or clerk, he declared ominously.

"Perhaps if old Geordie apologised," Campbell suggested tentatively, and the matter was settled thus. If the old man would come to the Chief and acknowledge his fault he would be reinstated.

But to get old Geordie to apologise was no light task. When all the officers had done their best with him he still remained adamant. He would apologise to no man—not, not to Prince Rupert himself, were he present.

They had almost given up in despair when Charles had an inspiration.

"It might make him a little easier on me, Geordie," he

said slyly. "He knows you and I are in sympathy with each other in our iniquity, and I might get off a little easier if you'd smooth him down a bit."

Campbell seized upon this weapon. "That's just what I've been thinking, Mr. Stuart," he declared. "There's no doubt that if Geordie could see his way clear to mollify the Chief a little you would certainly be let down much easier."

The scheme worked. Geordie made it very clear that he was apologising for the sake of his friend and no other reason; but he promised that on the morrow he would go to the Bourgeois and humble himself duly.

He stipulated that there was to be no one present to witness the ceremony, and the immortal apology might have remained in oblivion and have been lost to the annals of the Hudson's Bay Company had not Carruthers happened to be in an inner room of the office and overheard it. He brought the report to Bachelors' Hall that evening, and the smoky rafters rang with laughter.

Old Geordie shuffled in and stood just inside the door, waiting. The Chief looked up uncompromisingly. "Well," he asked sharply, "what do you want here?"

Old Geordie looked like anything but a humble suppliant. He resembled more than ever a Scottish terrier, and one that was about to take a nip out of somebody.

He looked up with his sidelong glance from under his bushy brows.

"Ye mind whit Ah sed till ye, yister-morn," he barked gruffly.

"I do, indeed," said the Chief Factor sternly.

"Ye mind where Ah telled ye tae gang," continued the little man.

"I certainly do."

"Weell," Geordie concluded shortly, "ye're no tae gang. Ye're tae bide here." And, turning his back upon the Chief, he shuffled away.

It was not exactly what might be called an apology; but it was a reprieve for the Chief Factor from an impending

doom, and therefore showed that Geordie was on friendly terms with him again. At least the Chief accepted it so. Geordie continued in his place, and there was no more said upon the matter.

Charles's case was not so easily disposed of. Upon that the Chief maintained an ominous silence. One of the men was given the work the rebel had dropped and no more was heard of the matter. But Charles well knew that the fire was only banked up and would be found hot and glowing when the time came to stir it into flame.

CHAPTER XVII

Banished

BUT a few days later as he rode along the soft black highway he saw a vision that banished all his troubles as though they had been blown away by a prairie wind. Just beyond the coulee he met a small cavalcade coming up the road: old Murray mounted and riding, for all his years, like a young hunter, Flemmand, the half-breed servant loping behind, and at her uncle's side Flora, on her dancing black mount, sitting like a young queen on her throne, and looking more beautiful, Charles thought, in her dark green riding habit than even in the sky-blue silk! The old man saluted curtly, the girl smiled, a light in her eyes. As they swept into the driveway, and Charles, riding slowly, watched them, she turned in her saddle and waved her whip.

The lessening of Charles's work and the slackening of business during the summer season, was leaving the young clerks with much time on their hands. Archie and Ferguson rode out the next afternoon to a Metis horse-race on the prairie, but they could not persuade Charles to leave the office. The sound of their horses' hoofs had scarcely died away, however, when he was mounted and speeding in the opposite direction.

And, strange to say, about the same time a young lady took her basket and her scissors, and announced that she was going down to the coulee to gather flowers for the dinner table.

"But, Flora dear," said her aunt in her soft, complaining voice, "we really do not need the wild flowers; there are so many in your garden. And I am afraid you will get your feet damp. Let Flemmand fetch them if you must have them."

"Oh, but Aunt Murray, dear," expostulated the girl, "there are no garden flowers like the wild ones that grow in the coulee. And I couldn't let Flemmand gather them. It would be like letting him eat my dinner." She kissed her and ran down the garden walk, Burk capering ahead of her. Mrs. Murray watched her from the low window and sighed. It was wonderful to be young and bright and happy. "I really hope she won't get her feet damp, though," she murmured.

Flora tripped along the path, humming under her breath a gay song about gathering garlands.

Her uncle's long, narrow farm had been left almost entirely uncultivated. It stretched past the highway away out on to the prairie, "as far as one could see under a horse." But the Chief Factor had enough and to spare laid up for his old age, and, except for his garden around the house and the hay for his horses, he cared nothing about his land. So it was left to grow up in a garden of wild flowers.

Here was the fire-weed lifting its flaming torch on the hillside, and black-eyed Susans winking and smiling and nodding their golden heads. Farther down there were columbines and flaring orange meadow lilies, and the stream bed was carpeted with lady's slippers. But Flora did not gather any. As soon as she reached the stream she turned and slowly made her way up the coulee towards the highway. She was not singing now, she was listening intently to the sound of galloping hoofs on the soft dirt road.

The galloping stopped suddenly at the bridge. Burk charged up the pathway, barking joyously, and the next moment the Young Chevalier was coming down the path, leading his horse.

It was impossible for them to hide the fact that they were overjoyed at seeing each other again. She forgot all about Marie Rose, he forgot everything but the rapture of being with her. He tied his horse to a tree, and they plunged into the little grove.

When her basket was filled they sat down on an old willow trunk. The poplars whispered over their heads, the elms screened them from the world. It was their first opportunity to get really acquainted, and they told each other everything, like a pair of children who had just met.

She told him about her old home in Upper Canada, where her father and mother were buried, and all about her journey with her dear friends to the west; and about Alice Douglas, who was Mrs. MacDonald now, and who had come all the way from Scotland to Lake Athabasca.

"She was wonderfully brave," Charles said, though he was really thinking she was wonderfully blessed in being allowed to travel in such company.

"And so she should be, when she was going to marry such a brave man," Flora said wisely.

Charles told her about his life in St. Andrew's, and the mother he had left waiting for him, and his trip out from Stromness; and they talked frankly about his adventure with Marie Rose on the ice. He told how gallantly the girl had behaved, and for a while Flora fell silent, thinking of Marie Rose and all Adelaide had told her.

They would have wandered all day along the banks of the stream, but that he was reminded that he must be at the fort an hour before the supper time.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, as he turned reluctantly up the path, "that I have had a stroke of good luck. I'm going to have the Edward in my name changed to Edmund. I'm an outlaw now."

"What crime have you committed?" she asked laughingly.

"I'm not sure; but I think it must be high treason. It's a long story. May I ride down here to-morrow and tell you all about it?"

"To-morrow I ride down to the Lower Fort—with Flemmand," she said.

"If I should happen to ride down there at the same time you wouldn't mind, would you?" he asked humbly.

She hesitated just a moment, knowing that her Uncle would mind very much. Then her little chin came up suddenly and her mouth grew firm.

"No," she said in a whisper, "I don't think I'd—mind."

Charles rode back to the fort, not on Rouge Garry, the horse he had come out on, but on winged Pegasus, soaring far above all the columns and accounts and Chief Factors of the Company. He strode into the mess hall to supper, radiating gladness. The Chief Factor, at the head of the table, regarded him under lowering brows. He experienced a fierce satisfaction in the fact that the young rebel should look so impudently gay on the eve of his execution. MacNeill promised himself that he would not be so insultingly cheerful on the morrow.

As Charles was crossing the square to the Indian Hall the next morning he met Louis running up from the Depot, dancing with joy.

"Go Norway House, to-day!" he cried, showing an armful of very grand new apparel which he had just purchased for the occasion. "Pierre and me, we mak' de grande treep."

"Well done, Louis!" Charles cried. "Hope you have a bon voyage! Come and see me before you go!"

Louis beamed. The young M'sieu Stuart was very free-handed, and would certainly give him a farewell gift.

Charles had just entered the Indian Hall when old Geordie came padding after him. Since he had been reinstated in the service old Geordie had more than ever the air of a terrier on guard. He watched Charles as a faithful dog would watch his master's goods.

"He'll be wantin' ye," he whispered, with a jerk of his thumb towards the Chief Factor's house.

Archie looked up from his account book, his eyes full of apprehension.

"Now hold your horses, boy," warned Chief Trader Campbell.

"We who are about to die salute you!" Charles quoted tragically. He gave the Red River shrug, shoulders up,

hands thrown out, and, slapping old Geordie on the back, marched away whistling.

MacNeill was sitting at his desk as Charles obeyed his summons to enter. He looked up casually. "Mr. Stuart," he said, between puffs of his pipe, "you have been appointed to Fort Hearne for the coming winter."

For a moment Charles stood and looked at him. It seemed impossible that he had heard aright. If Fort Garry was called the Traders' Paradise, Fort Hearne, that far outpost on the bleak shore of the Great Slave Lake, was the perfect type of its opposite. Charles had often heard of it. MacNeill had chosen his revenge well. But the young man took the blow standing. There was an almost imperceptible straightening of his shoulders, and then he answered quite as casually.

"Ah—thank you. When do I go?"

"There is a boat leaving for Norway House this afternoon, it will meet the Athabasca Brigade there."

A blinding rage against the tyrant who held him so completely in his power seized Charles. For one moment he had a desperate impulse to refuse; to defy him and take the consequence. But he held himself back. He would never see Flora Carmichael again was the uppermost thought, but it was also the thought of her that kept him from doing something irretrievably rash.

"Shall I have time to get my traps together?" he heard himself asking.

"That need not take you long. The boat starts in an hour." MacNeill took up his pen again, and resumed his work as though he had given an order to his apprentice clerk to step over to the Depot instead of the Arctic Circle.

It was a physical impossibility for Charles to go without another word.

"You have the power to send me and I must go," he said with an ominous quiet. "But I promise you that we shall meet again and—it will be my turn."

He went out, head up, and the Chief said never a word. But for all his gallant bearing Charles's heart was sick

within him. He cared very little for his banishment; it promised new scenes and adventures. But he knew quite well that he would never be allowed to come out of exile until his term was up—four years more. And he would never see Flora Carmichael again.

He ran upstairs to his room and slipped the hook of his door. He must have one minute to write to her before Archie and the other men found out and came storming in upon him. He snatched some writing paper from his cassette and wrote on his knee. Briefly he told her that he could not ride with her that afternoon. He was banished to the Mackenzie River District, for how long he could not say. He dared not say all he longed to, dared not ask if he might hope to meet her again. And so his note was rather cold. He was afraid to write too much and so he wrote very little.

He had scarcely finished when Archie was thundering at the door, incoherent with rage and grief. He was speedily followed by Campbell and the Doctor, and even Ferguson came hurrying in.

Charles was the only one who was calm, though his face was pale and his eyes were dangerously bright. He even made a pretence at being cheerful, as he flung his belongings into his bag.

"They say you sleep all winter at Fort Hearne," he remarked. "I'll make up for all the sleep I lost getting up to be early at work in the Packing House."

It was hard to get a word alone with Archie, but a word was sufficient. Archie asked no questions, as he tucked the note away carefully in his shirt pocket, though his eyes showed his amazement.

They all followed him down to the landing, even Ferguson lamenting. The old Doctor and Mr. Campbell were muttering things under their breath concerning the Bourgeois that would not have been good for him to hear. Archie, alone, said nothing. Parting with Charlie was like taking leave of his life and he looked as if he had been stricken with a sudden illness.

A hurried good-bye, a leap on board, and the banished one was in the boat slipping swiftly down the Red River almost before he realised what had happened. In a short time he had rounded Point Douglas, and Fort Garry and his waving friends had disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII

A Chance for Liberty

THE Chief Factor at Norway House held one of the most important as well as one of the most difficult positions in the service. As York Factory was the Liverpool of Rupert's Land, so Norway House was its London. Here Parliament met once a year to administer the affairs of the Company; here all its far-reaching lines converged; and thither came men from the Buffalo Plains, from the Mackenzie River, from the slopes of the Rockies and from the bleak shores of Hudson's Bay.

The man at the head of Norway House was also the admiral of the Company's inland fleet. Here the rollicking, irresponsible voyageurs came yelling into port from every lake and river of the wide domain; and it was often a task requiring both tact and muscle to induce the gay Baptiste to go out again under oar and towing-line. For indeed there was rarely a season that did not see Norway House in a state of turmoil over the threatened breakdown of the transport system. So the man at the head of this post needed a strong arm and a steady head.

Chief Factor Murdoch Cameron, the father of Marie Rose, had both, and was chiefly renowned for his muscular prowess. Every man of importance in the Service had a descriptive nickname. Cameron's was "Old Murder"—a play on his Christian name which was not altogether inappropriate, for he would knock down a turbulent boatman or a disobedient apprentice clerk with complete equanimity, and never look to see if he rose again.

Under ordinary circumstances Cameron would not have noticed an apprentice clerk more or less arriving or departing during his busy summer. He would have worked

him hard while he was under his command, and would have seen him go without even enquiring his destination. But when Apprentice Clerk Stuart from Fort Garry stepped out of a Red River boat at Norway House he came as a solution to a perplexing problem that was worrying the Bourgeois more than all the drunken orgies of the Portage la Loche Brigade.

Ever since his daughter had returned from her year's schooling in the homeland she had constituted this problem. She had come home from York Factory against her father's orders, leaving behind the indignant chief of Fort Hudson to whom she had been promised in marriage. And now another offer had come for her. Chief Trader McRae, of the important post of Fort Saskatchewan, had sent a letter with the spring brigade, asking for Cameron's daughter. This was an alliance for which Cameron was extremely anxious, but once more the girl was in the depths of sullen rebellion, and all because of some silly notion she had taken for a young apprentice clerk on the voyage home. Her father was loth to force her; Marie Rose was his youngest child, and for all his murderous reputation he was not a hard man. So, all unknowing, Chief Factor MacNeill had sent his enemy to the very place where he had a strong chance for liberty.

It was into this net of circumstances that the unconscious Charles stepped on a balmy August day when he landed at Norway House. The fort was a very gay and very busy place in summer. It was the most beautiful and well-kept of all the Company's posts. The buildings were freshly painted and in excellent repair; walks were trim; a garden bloomed besides the Bourgeois's house, and a wide green sward stretched between the stockade and the lake. Along the white sand of the shore lay the boats of two brigades being overhauled and made ready for their long voyage. The enclosure rang with the sound of the hammering and the laughter and shouting of the men as they hurried to and fro between the shore and the storehouse with the cargo for the boats.

Charles was hailed by old friends from the York Brigade, "Ho, Boy!" "Hooraw, Waby-stig-wan!" and there was much hand-shaking and giving of tobacco. As he walked up to the building where the transient officers were housed calling, "Hello, Bateese!" "Ho, Boy, Big Wind!" "Hurrah, Duncan!", a stout young man with an amazed, round face came leaping down the walk and flung himself upon him.

Johnny McBain again! He had been transferred, when Piapot's Creek was abandoned, to a post in the Swan River District under his old friend Halliday. And Halliday had managed to get him a snug berth at Norway House, through the influence he now wielded in the Family Compact. Charles forgot all his troubles in seeing old Johnny again, and his friend's rage over the injustice done him was very grateful to his indignant heart.

"Mackenzie River!" Johnny fairly shrieked as he stamped beside him on the way up to the building. "Botany Bay!" His outpourings were so much more grievous than when he himself was ordered to Piapot's Creek, that Charles was forced to turn comforter.

"A'm no died yet, me whatever, as old Geordie says," he declared, and proceeded to cheer him further by telling of old Geordie's apology to the Bourgeois. But Johnny was scarcely able to smile.

"It's just as I told you," he cried, taking up his plaint again. "It's a mistake to work hard for this rotten Company. Take it easy while you're in, and get out the minute your contract expires. MacNeill! The dirty Indian!"

They were turning up the board walk that led to the hostel, when a tall man, in voyageur dress, dark and lithe and with the unmistakable stamp of one long in command, came striding down towards the water.

"Look, Charlie, that's Chief Trader MacDonald," whispered Johnny McBain as he passed. "He's the man you'll be under on the way north. Thank heaven he's a gentleman."

Charles turned eagerly; not because MacDonald was one of the great figures in the service, and the hero of a pretty romance, but because he had the high honour of being married to the woman who had brought Flora Carmichael to the Red River.

Chief Trader MacDonald was worthy of a second glance for his own sake. Though still in his early forties his name stood high in the annals of the Company. He had penetrated into unexplored regions of the west and had opened up unknown rivers for the Company's brigades, and had even climbed the shining wall of the Rockies and traded with the turbulent Indians in their mountain wilds. He was especially successful in dealing with the Indians and voyageurs and had even managed the Portage la Loche Brigade—that fleet of boats that sped far north to where the height of land broke the jewelled chain of lakes and rivers reaching to the Arctic Ocean.

But year after year, when the ruling body of the Hudson's Bay Company sat in the seats of the mighty in Old London, the pictured face of the gallant Prince Rupert looked down upon many a name of the wintering partners recommended for high honours, but never on the name of Roderick MacDonald. He had been raised just one step above clerkship, but beyond that all his exploring and trading could not move him.

"MacDonald's a case in point," grumbled Johnny. "His trouble is that he's not related either by marriage or otherwise to the Family Compact. You can marry any kind of greasy savage in this country and you'll be made Governor, but MacDonald married a lady! Huh!"

Suddenly he turned squarely upon his friend, an inspiration illuminating his round face.

"Charlie! If you'd only act wisely now, you could snap your fingers in MacNeill's face!" His voice dropped to a whisper. "Marie Rose is here. I danced with her last night. Her father can do anything."

Charles, who had been looking about nervously for fear of encountering Marie Rose, turned upon him.

"You unmitigated bounder. Do you think I'd use my acquaintance with her? . . ."

"Oh, yes, I know you will be high and mighty about it just now, but you won't be so haughty when you've been frost-bitten for four years among the Esquimaux. Marie Rose is prettier than ever and talks about you all the time. Lots of better fellows than you have married half-breed girls!"

"I didn't mean that I considered myself above her," cried Charles hot and raging. "What I'm trying to get into your head is that I would consider a fellow an unpardonable scoundrel who'd marry any girl to save himself from hardship."

"Pshaw, you'll never be anything but a moonyass, if you live here till you're pensioned. If the girl is willing, and there's no doubt about it, why not? You could be a Chief Factor before you're thirty!"

"If you don't stop being a confounded jackass," cried Charles losing his temper entirely, "I'll throw you into the lake!"

"Oh, all right," grumbled his well-meaning friend. "If you will hang yourself, why do it thoroughly." He sighed deeply. "After all I guess it's no worse to sell beads to the Esquimaux than work under this old cinnamon bear here, even as a father-in-law. I've been here a fortnight and I can tell you MacNeill's an angel of light in comparison. Come on; let's go and gnaw some bones with the other animals."

The big bell in the square was ringing and men and officers were hastening to the midday meal. The officers' mess at Norway House during the summer was a lively gathering. The long table was filled with bronzed and bearded men from all over Rupert's Land, many of them showing a strain of Indian blood. The only shaven man at the table was a jolly priest who sat near the Chief Factor and made everybody around him merry.

Charles listened eagerly to tales from all over the Company's vast Empire: stories of ice fields far up on the

slopes of the Rockies, of the treacherous Indian tribes beyond the Yukon Mountains, of the vast herds of caribou that migrated from the barren lands of the Arctic, of the myriad wild fowl on the eastern shores of Hudson's Bay. It was all very fascinating; he began to hear again the luring call of the far places.

He gave the most careful attention to the dark, hairy, jovial man at the head of the table. Chief Factor Cameron alone held the power to annul his sentence, and though the subject was a delicate one, he could not but hope that Marie Rose's father might feel some natural gratitude towards him.

Johnny McBain had been introducing his friend to all the younger men seated near. A dark young man with an eagle nose and a strikingly handsome face, displaying a strong strain of Cree blood, was seated next to Charles, and though Johnny McBain had met him only once before he ventured to do the honours in his genial fashion.

"Mr. Chatake, Mr. Stuart," he said easily.

Charles bowed; the young man merely nodded curtly without looking at him.

"My name happens to be Melbourne," he remarked coldly to the opposite wall. The self-appointed master of ceremonies mumbled something like an apology, and remained silent so long that Charles turned towards him enquiringly and found him in grave danger of choking with suppressed laughter.

"It's Melbourne, sure enough," he whispered shakingly. "The Indians call him the Pelican, *Chatake*, you know. Look at his nose and you'll know why. And, by Jove, I forgot it wasn't his real name. He didn't exactly see the joke!" he added strangling again.

"I understand we are to be fellow-travellers, Mr. Stuart," Chief Trader MacDonald said. "Mr. Melbourne, here, has been at Fort Hearne," he added invitingly.

"Beastly hole," growled Mr. "Chatake." "A month of black flies and giant mosquitoes constitutes the summer;

for the other eleven months you are frozen, so you don't notice the discomforts."

"Mr. Stuart from Fort Garry?" asked a young apprentice clerk, touching Charles on the arm as they rose from the table. "The Bourgeois wants to see you, please. You are to go to his office at two."

An hour later, full of high hope, Charles knocked at the door of the Chief's office. A deep rumbling voice bade him enter. Marie Rose's father was seated at his desk. His bushy hair, his long wiry beard that covered his breast and his erect eyebrows were almost the same colour as his brown face. His eyes blinked fiercely from beneath his brows. He turned as the young man entered, and shoved his spectacles up into his hair, thereby adding something to his already wild appearance. But his welcome dispelled all Charles's preconceived notions of him. Cameron was a big, loud-voiced, bullying fellow with a terrible temper, but he had a kindly easy-going manner upon ordinary occasions.

"Very glad to meet you, Mr. Stuart," he said, shaking hand warmly. "I have always wanted an opportunity to thank you for the great service you did me last summer on Hudson's Bay. Several eyewitnesses told me how gallantly you went to my daughter's rescue, when you might have climbed on board."

"It was Miss Cameron who behaved gallantly," Charles declared, much embarrassed.

The Chief waved his hand, "Sit down and let's talk over your plans; you seem to have got into another ice-jam, eh?" He indicated an open letter on his desk, and his eyes twinkled as at a good joke. "You are being sent to Siberia, I understand," he declared jovially, twisting and raking his long beard. "Fort Hearne! MacNeill's a lad! He couldn't have sent you much farther away, could he?"

"I have been left with no doubts that it was Mr. MacNeill's intention to send me as far as the Company's

boundaries permit," remarked Charles coldly. It was no subject for jesting.

The elder man sat back in his chair and looked keenly at the younger. He was of a good family, and was plainly a gentleman. MacNeill had commended him very highly last winter and so had Murray. If he allowed him to marry Marie Rose, he would soon be promoted; and it would spite MacNeill, which would be another advantage.

He picked up his long quill pen, drove it into a bottle with an energetic movement and, rising from his chair, began walking up and down. Charles rose also; the Chief Factor paused before him.

"Do you want to go to Mackenzie District?" he asked abruptly.

"It is not Mackenzie District I object to," replied Charles. "But I naturally dislike being sent anywhere as a punishment, when I have done nothing wrong."

Cameron grunted. He had his own way of dealing with insubordination, which he felt was much better than MacNeill's, but he rather liked the young fellow's spirit. He walked up and down again. "I have a position here I think you might fill," he said at last, raking his beard. Charles's heart leaped and he heard a humming in his ears which were strained to listen for the next words. "My chief accountant needs a man, and I understand that's been your line. Halliday, of Fort Hampton, sent me a fellow a fortnight ago who isn't worth a tinker's curse. I'm thinking of shipping him north for the Fort Hearne work, and keeping you here."

Charles's heart paused in its soaring and came thudding to the soles of his moccasins. To think of poor Johnny McBain being his scapegoat!

"I couldn't remain here feeling I'd been the cause of some other fellow's banishment, sir," he stammered.

"You wouldn't. This young Mac—whatever his name is—has to be shipped somewhere, into the back waters of the service. Sit down till I explain the situation. I understand that you have always shown a desire for

hard work. I like that. I think we should get on well. If you remain here and succeed, I shall see that promotion comes your way." He paused, looked out of the window, twisted his beard, then turned suddenly. "Have you ever thought of getting married?"

The hot blood rushed into Charles's face. "No, sir," he managed to say, not quite truthfully. "It has been out of the question for me, of course."

Cameron waved his hand. "Not if you stay here. I understand there has been some sort of attachment between you and my daughter since your escapade together."

For a few moments the big windows of the office with their view of Playgreen Lake and the busy boatmen, kept moving from one wall to the other. Charles suddenly arose, feeling he must hold the floor down.

"You are very good, sir—too good," he stammered at last. "But I'm afraid it wouldn't be—Miss Cameron wouldn't—" He stopped overcome with a strange feeling of utter degradation.

"Oh, Rosie's quite willing, I assure you!" laughed Rosie's father, entirely oblivious to the possibility that this apprentice clerk might not be equally so. "I will confess I had higher ambitions for her; but she is a determined lassie, and—I want to see her settled."

Charles suddenly felt hot indignation boiling up within him. These Chiefs of Rupert's Land! They moved men and women about as old Geordie and Dufresne moved their pieces in a game of checkers!

"I am deeply sensible of the great honour, and the great kindness you are doing me, Mr. Cameron." The floor was settling down under the weight of his rising wrath, he was becoming master of himself. "But I have no idea of marrying for many years yet, if ever, indeed. And—it would be quite out of the question, I assure you."

The Chief Factor stared at him. Had he heard aright? Here was a young apprentice clerk, under sentence of death, so far as his prospects were concerned, boldly in-

sulting the mighty ruler of Norway House and refusing an honour that any officer of the Company might have envied him!

"Do you realise what you are doing?" he demanded, red rage leaping into his eyes. "Do you realise, sir, that I have conferred a tremendous honour upon you, and at the same time have done a great injury to my daughter's prospects? Do you realise who I am? And who are you that you dare presume. . . ."

Charles's small stock of discretion was all gone by this time. Cameron had given him a rope and he proceeded to hang himself thoroughly. He blazed forth: "You certainly do your daughter an unpardonable injury, sir, when you offer her to any man, when you have no reason to suppose he desires the honour, were he the Governor of Rupert's Land himself!"

"Old Murder" Cameron had but one method of dealing with rebellion, and had been known to knock down an over-bold Chief Trader who defied him. This was a situation calling for more than words. He leaped to his feet, his fists clenched. Charles met him more than half-way, fierce joy in his eyes. This was far better than MacNeill's method! "Don't raise your hand to me, sir," he cried, "or I'll forget you are Miss Cameron's father, and I'll knock you down!"

The tall agile youth, strong as steel, quick as lightning and reckless with rage, was a dangerous adversary. The older man stepped back glaring. Charles waited a moment, then turned and flung out of the office.

He went back to his room and, latching the door, sank down on the bare slats of the bed, sick with disgust and disappointment. Now that it was all over he realised how high his hopes had been. He dared not think of Flora; he could not but think of her. It was the hour of his despair; the evil hour for which his mother had prayed that he might have courage.

CHAPTER XIX

Out of the Fowler's Snare

AS soon as the daring young rebel had slammed the door in his face, Chief Factor Cameron tramped out of his office. His rage sought a victim and it turned upon the girl who had been the cause of his humiliation.

He found his daughter on a back porch of their dwelling that overlooked the garden. She was sitting on the floor in her buckskin skirt and leggings, her fishing-tackle scattered about her, her gun across her knees—sitting dreaming and waiting for her father. She trembled when she heard his footstep, but not with fear. She knew that the Young Chevalier had arrived, had spied him that morning from behind the spruces as he leaped from the boat. And now she was waiting. She was not unaware of her worth as her father's daughter, her eyes were shining with hope.

The sight of her seated on the ground in her Indian dress, the great contrast to what she should have been after all he had spent on her education, roused her father's anger to greater heat.

"Get up from there!" he commanded roughly. Her frightened obedience angered him still more. "Do you know what has come of your fishing and hunting and acting like a degraded half-breed?" he roared, kicking her fishing rod into a corner. Marie Rose gave him one terrified glance, and then stood before him, her sleek head bent, waiting for the blow to fall.

"This poverty-stricken apprentice clerk whom you have placed above the best men of the Service! What does he think of you? You are as the dirt beneath his feet. He won't look at you—no, not even to save himself from being sent down the Mackenzie for four years!"

Marie Rose turned a strange pale yellow, and her eyes gleamed, but she said nothing. Even when her father burst into raging profanity, and vowed that she should be shipped that very week to Fort Saskatchewan, she made no sound. Abuse came pouring upon her in torrents, but she moved only once. In his rage Cameron disclosed how he intended to punish the criminal. He would not send him north with the brigade,—that was too easy. A trip in a canoe with one guide a month later might cool the haughty spirit of his Royal Highness.

It was then that Marie Rose moved. She made no sound, but she raised her head like a young fawn scenting danger, and a deep colour mounted to her pale cheek.

When her terrifying parent had tramped away she still stood motionless, staring straight before her as if she saw some tragic thing in the bright garden that stretched down to the lake.

A door behind her opened softly and a half-breed woman, in a buckskin skirt and bright head shawl, came stealthily through. Her broad brown face and soft eyes held a wealth of love and pity.

"Marie Rose," she whispered brokenly, speaking in her native Cree-French, "my poor little Marie Rose!"

She put her brown hand on the girl's shoulder, but her daughter turned away as though she neither saw nor heard. She moved slowly down the garden path towards the lake. She did not run lightly as usual, but crept away into the willows like a wounded animal striving to hide its mortal hurt.

Later in the afternoon, when Johnny McBain came running up to his room for news, Charles had little to give, being careful to guard the name of Marie Rose.

"Cameron's joined hands with MacNeill, so there's no hope of my sentence being commuted!" he concluded briefly.

"With MacNeill!" raged Johnny. "Why, they love each other like two old wild-cats. How do you account for that?"

"I wouldn't attempt to account for anything either of them does," said Charles, moodily. "But you look out for yourself, Johnny, old boy. Cameron's got you on his proscribed list."

"Mc?" Johnny gasped, in righteous indignation. "Old Murder? What have I done?"

"The sin seems to be one of omission." And, guarding carefully his secret, he gave the hint that the Chief had dropped, that Johnny, too, might find himself on the road to Mackenzie River.

Johnny McBain hurried back to his neglected work, his theory regarding the wisdom of avoiding labour rudely shaken. But he had not been gone long before Charles heard him leaping up the stairs again, and he burst into the little room, his eyes wide and round with joy.

"The old Bear's turning human, I do believe," he shouted, hammering Charles upon the back. "Williams says you're to go to the chief accountant's office with me. You're to be there for the next month, anyway. We'll be here together, Old Chevalier. Something's happened. Old Murder just couldn't agree with MacNeill. It's fair impossible, man."

Charles went into the chief accountant's office, his mind in a bewildered turmoil. He could not believe that Cameron had forgiven him. Was it possible that Marie Rose had interceded for him? In any case his position was intolerable.

Evening came without any sign of a solution of the puzzle. Johnny McBain was making himself resplendent for a dance; but Charles was not in a festive mood, and he wandered down to the water's edge to see what Louis and Pierre were doing. The Athabasca Brigade, with whom he had expected to sail on the morrow, were being given their usual send-off. They had swept all the shavings and litter out of the boat-builders' house, and already all the boys and girls in the place were gathering for the dance. The enclosure rang with laughter, mingled with the scraping of tuning fiddles.

The long northern twilight still lingered over the coloured mirror of the lake and the purpling woods stood reflecting in the glassy surface. A fleet of birch bark canoes with Indians coming eagerly to view the carnival, slipped silently across the shining golden floor—shadows in a world of shadows.

A tall figure came swinging up from the lake, and Chief Trader MacDonald paused to speak.

"I had hoped to have your company to-morrow, Mr. Stuart," he said, "but Mr. Williams tells me you are to remain at Norway House."

"I sail under sealed orders, Mr. MacDonald," Charles answered, "but I have a suspicion that I must sail—somewhere."

"I wish I could take you on to help me for a time at Athabasca House. We have excellent reports of your work in Fort Garry."

"Thank you. I imagine, though, that Athabasca House is not far enough away for me."

The elder man heard the note of bitterness in the younger's voice. His own experience in the service had not hardened him. Instead it had given him a deep sympathy with all who smarted under injustice.

"Come for a little walk along the shore," he invited.

Charles fell into his slow stride and the two strolled along the broad board walk that followed the line of the shore. And before he knew it, Charles was telling him something of the injustice done him. He made no mention of his encounter with Cameron—that would involve Marie Rose; but he left nothing of what MacNeill had done untold.

"I don't understand why you are not coming with me unless your sentence has been commuted," MacDonald said when it was all told. "We are the last brigade going north this season."

Charles merely shrugged. He could not explain that to remain was almost worse than to go.

MacDonald walked along, his hands locked behind him,

his keen eyes on the shining waters of the lake. Yes, there were injustices in the service, he said at last; there were bound to be, where the men raised to high positions were not all just themselves. But a man must not let the iron enter his soul. Youth was hot and always in a hurry, and it was hard to see that almost always the longest way around was the shortest way home. Had he ever tried the Grand Traverse, on the Prairie? In the winter, if you took the Grand Traverse on Great Slave Lake, you could run across from Fort Hearne to Fort Thompson in about twenty-four hours. But you must be assured of a clear day and an uninterrupted run. It was not the safe, sure way. To follow the shore meant a slow trip of more than a week, but you had good places to make camp in the woods, with shelter and fuel; and it was better for your dogs and had no dangers attending. And so it was in life. Men all wanted to go by the Grand Traverse, straight to whatever goal their ambition or heart's desire had fixed; but life generally sent them round the long way. And it was unwise to quarrel with life.

"It's a great service, this Hudson's Bay Company," he ended up. "It's a man's work, and if a man doesn't fret over all the little bays and indents he must enter, and the capes he must round, he will reach camp in good time."

A servant hurried down the walk, calling for MacDon-ald, and Charles strolled on alone to the end of the plank walk, and along the path that led by the water-side. The dancers were hard at work in the boat-house; the shouts and laughter and the penetrating lilt of the fiddles floated out over the amber lake and followed him down the darkening shore. From the dense woods across the little bay arose the laughter of loons, answered by the merriment from the dance hall. He paused beside a low clump of cedar that grew close to the water. He was on the edge of the forest now, and the sweet, clean smell of balsam and spruce, mingled with the fragrance of the lake, floated around him. The forest was wrapped in soft dusk, but the water still glowed with the remembrance of the sunset

glory. He leaned against the fragrant boughs and felt the peace of the summer night enter his storm-tossed soul.

"*M'sieu Chevalier!*" Out of the shadows of the willows that overhung the water came two soft, whispered words.

Charles stood rigid. Had he been dreaming that some one called him? He stepped forward softly, and peered into the shadows. For the first time he noticed a canoe right beside him, drawn up against a floating log, and almost covered by the overhanging shrubs. A figure was kneeling in it. He caught the outline of a dainty head against the coloured water.

"Marie Rose!" he cried out in his astonishment. He could see her face now; it was white, and her eyes shone. He took a swift step nearer, and she touched the log of driftwood with her paddle and pushed herself out.

"Hush! You mus' not speak; he hear you!" She leaned forward and whispered tremblingly. "You go! Go to-morrow. Go wit' Chief Trader MacDonal'! Don' stop!"

"Marie Rose!" he whispered. "Why? What is it? What's the matter?"

"You go wit' Chief Trader MacDonal'," she repeated, her eyes glowing. "My fader, he send you nex' mont'—in leetle canoe—wit' one guide." The words came from her in sobbing breaths: "You freeze. You be los'. You go to-morrow wit' Chief Trader MacDonal'. Don' let him stop you!"

She dipped her paddle, and Charles sprang out upon the log, holding onto the willows.

"Marie Rose," he whispered, "wait! Let me speak to you!"

But the canoe had slipped out from the shadows and was gliding across the little bay, leaving a long golden trail behind it.

"Oh, Marie Rose! Little Marie Rose!" he whispered with a choking sob. He stood straining his eyes after her, till she became one with the shadows of the other shore.

He went stumbling slowly back to the fort and walked up and down in the darkness until he saw MacDonald's tall figure cross the bars of light that streamed from the boathouse where the fiddling and the dancing of the Red River Jig had reached a furious height. He had been down for a last look at his boats to see that everything was in readiness for the morrow. It was impossible for Charles to tell part of his story without telling all. He stammered out his tale of the day's encounter with the Chief, and the night's revelation of his ruthlessness.

MacDonald made no comment; he merely nodded his head. "You must go with me to-morrow," he declared. "He can't prevent your leaving. Your orders came from Fort Garry. Say nothing about it; I shall see to your outfit. And now, good-night." He smiled, and held out his hand. "And hurrah for the Northland!"

Charles went slowly up the bare echoing stairway to the room he was to share with Johnny McBain.

Johnny was still down at the dance in the boat-house, and did not return until the last trip-man had gone whooping to his cabin. But long after his friend was snoring Charles lay awake, staring at the pale square of light made by the bare window. His heart was sick over his own cruelty. Marie Rose had looked so like a little, hurt child. She had done him this great and noble service, and he had let her go without even a word of thanks.

His chivalrous young heart cried out that he must not leave her thus. A fierce thirst for revenge added its power to the temptation. He would stay and marry her and defy MacNeill and render Cameron powerless against him.

And then one of his mother's guardian angels came and stood by his side radiant, strong, alluring—the girl of the Red River with her steady blue eyes and her lilting song. And he knew that whatever calamity came upon him he must be true to that vision. And he fell asleep and dreamed of Brignal Banks.

CHAPTER XX

The Lady of Athabasca Lake

SEATED one day in the stern sheets of an Athabasca Brigade boat, his face plastered with grease and charcoal as a protection against mosquitoes and "bull-dog" flies, Charles looked back upon his school days in St. Andrew's and thought how thrilled he would have been could he have guessed that one day he would go speeding up the great flood of the Saskatchewan River, with a fleet of twelve long boats, towards a far trading post in the Mackenzie River District. It would have seemed to him then that he had reached the land of all romance; and now he was really going, very much against his will and was leaving all romance far behind on the banks of the Red River.

But in spite of indignation and regrets he could not but enjoy the journey. He had been shut up in office and store so long that the free out-door life was like a release from prison.

MacDonald was the best companion he had met in Rupert's Land. He always had a book in his pocket, and gave them something from Scott or Carlyle, or more often Shakespeare, as they lay around the fires and smoked after the day's journey.

Two other Company officers, returning to their posts in the North, and Father La Rone, the priest who had made the table at Norway House so gay, made up the party. Father La Rone and Charles became fast friends over the care of a pair of images the priest was taking to his mission chapel on Lake Athabasca; one of the Virgin and Child, the other of St. Joseph. The priest was fearful lest they be injured by careless handling, so the heretic undertook them as his special charge on the portages.

The five men had many happy hours together, as they smoked their pipes beside the camp-fire, but in the day-time Charles was always out on the tracking line with the men. In spite of the fact that his face was black, his hair showed the same golden waves that had given him his Indian name, and "Waby-stig-wan" he became once more to the brigade. Whenever there was an unusually bad portage, or the towing line caught in the underbrush, or a boat refused to move off a sandbar, the men shouted for Waby-stig-wan, and victory was certain.

And there were many times when his help was needed. It was an incredibly toilsome journey. From the moment they entered the mouth of the Saskatchewan and the Grand Rapids roared at them to turn back, to the climb over the Long Portage, the journey was one long desperate struggle. But through it all the boatmen were the same laughing, joking, toiling, hungry crew as the gay lads with whom Charles had come up from York Factory. Every day he marvelled at them as they toiled cheerfully, week after week, wading waist-deep in twisting channels where the boats had to be coaxed along; running with tremendous loads, boats and all, over rock and sand and slippery mud; straining at the oars when both wind and current were contrary; hauling on the line against the rapids till hands were blistered and backs breaking; staggering over rocks where a false step would mean instant death, till moccasins were in rags and feet bleeding; rowing, poling, tracking, warping, the gallant voyageurs struggled on through stupendous days, and at night staggered into camp, sweating and heaving like overworked horses, to laugh and frolic over a monstrous supper, and gambol like children around the fire before they rolled into their blankets.

They were racing with the flying summer, a summer that sped faster the farther north they went; yet when the Sabbath came the brigade camped for the day on the banks of the river. Chief Trader MacDonald was one of the rare officers of the Company who insisted that his men have one day's rest in seven, no matter how great the haste. He

was always rewarded for his consideration, for well their rivals knew that "Les Rabisca," as the Athabasca men were nicknamed, would overtake and pass any brigade that sailed the rivers of Rupert's Land who dared to row ahead of them while they took their Sabbath rest.

The first Sunday of the trip they camped on the banks of the river where the Saskatchewan widened out into a small lake. In the middle of the silent sunny afternoon, as they lay about on the grass there arose a great clamour down the river, and round the bend there swept into view the Saskatchewan Brigade. They had left Norway House a day behind the Athabasca men, and were speeding far westward to Edinburgh House, a post near the Rocky Mountains. They came whooping past under sail and oar, and jeered and scoffed and roared abuse at "Les Rabisca" until the bluffs along the shore rang with their derisive contempt. And "Les Rabisca" stood up on the bank and yelled back insult for insult, in French and Cree, and English and Gaelic, with loud and profane promises of passing the enemy at an early date.

The next morning old L'Esperance, the guide, was shouting "Lève! Lève!" long before the stars had begun to pale above the poplar bluffs. By Monday night, refreshed by their rest, "Les Rabisca" were far on their way; by Tuesday they could hear the yelling of their rivals ahead; and by Wednesday the measured beat of their fiercely swung oars was gaining yard by yard on the Westerners. When the time for the noonday meal arrived the Athabasca men refusing to land, snatched some pemmican and dried meat without stopping; and as the Westerners drank their hot tea and ate their steaming "rouchou" on the heights above, the Athabasca Brigade went roaring past with Waby-stig-wan standing up in the stern sheets of the last boat, waving his cap and yelling like a drunken Indian!

Amid the laughter and shouting of the winners Charles looked back at the men on the shore and caught sight of a girl's figure standing out on a rock down near the water.

She was waving a bright shawl and continued to wave until the brigade disappeared. There was something vaguely familiar in the outline. Then they came to a bad rapid and he was out and up on the towing line and forgot all about her.

Soon they left the Saskatchewan and followed a chain of lakes and rivers northwest towards the Great Portage. The prairies disappeared, the forest trees grew larger and denser; at last they closed around them and their course became a narrow lane winding between towering walls of green.

It was impossible for Charles not to enjoy every day of the journey, even while he smarted under the injustice of his exile. He was following in the footsteps of Mackenzie and Franklin, and could not but feel the thrill of it. Mackenzie had mentioned this very river in his journal, he reflected, one evening as he lay full length before the fire smoking his pipe and listening to the soft sounds of the rapids far below.

The giant forest closed in around them fragrant and silent. Over in an open grassy space Father La Rone, with the voyageurs kneeling in a circle around him, led their evening prayers. The deep low chant of their litany mingled with the song of the rapid:

“Pray for us. Pray for us.”

Charles drew a great breath of the spicy air.

“It’s not nearly so bad as you hoped, old MacNeill,” he said softly, across the miles of forest and plain. If he had only had that ride. . . . He rolled up in his blanket and slept on the ground and dreamed, as he so often did, that the stream rushing past him was the Red River and he was riding down to Brignal Banks.

Just two months from the day they left Norway House they reached Portage La Loche. It was well named the Long Portage in that land of portages. Twelve miles of forest and muskeg and eight hundred feet of hill lay

between them and the river that would take them down to the Athabasca.

Portage La Loche was the place where the young knights of the oar and towing-line won their spurs. Not until a voyageur had been to the Long Portage and back could he take his place around the winter fire and spin yarns with the veterans. Neither could he stand up at horse-race or wedding and, pulling his cap on one side, strike an attitude, slap himself upon the breast and proclaim:

"Je suis un homme! Je suis un homme!"

To the Athabasca Brigade it presented a greater task than to the regular Portage La Loche tripmen, for the boats had to be dragged on rollers over the twelve miles of rock and sand and hill as well as the hundred-pound "pieces." The men worked like horses, and when the incredible task was ended and they camped on the banks of the Clearwater River, L'Esperance took out a warped and battered fiddle and they danced the Red River Jig on the sands.

And next they were shooting down the Athabasca with its great banks of limestone towering above them like Gothic ruins, dripping oil and tar and stored with sulphur and coal, where far up beyond their sight there belched forth a flame of burning gas, a great candle lit on the altar of the eternal hills by unseen hands and burning through long ages.

"I've always promised myself that I'll stop here some day," MacDonald said, sitting with Charles in the stern sheets as they shot down the current, and looking up at the majestic heights with the longing eyes of the explorer, "but so far I've always been too hurried. Unfortunately the Company is not interested in anything but furs."

The journey was all joy now in spite of cold wet days and chill nights. There was more tracking and very little portaging, but instead the mad joyous rush down a rapid, the wild thrill of the moment in the smooth water at its brink, the breathless dash, the gasping blinding leap

through the drowning spray and the swift whirl away into calm water with the deafening roar growing faint and fainter—it was glorious!

They had passed many a post of the Company by the way and the trip-men had always made themselves smart before approaching any sort of settlement. But one morning they appeared at the oars dressed in their finest: new moccasins and gay garters, embroidered shirts and sashes tied in coquettish knots, hair oiled and curled and caps set at the very jauntiest angle. Even the Chief had caught the fever, and was handsomer than ever in his best deer-skin shirt and a new crimson L'Assomption belt.

Early in the afternoon the river widened out into a great marsh, alive with wild fowl that rose in storms before their noisy approach. They were in one of the many channels connecting the grey flood of the river with the sparkling blue of Athabasca Lake; in a few moments all sails shot up and they were speeding over the shining surface of the great northern sea, the Lake of the Marshes, every boat racing with every other and the crews yelling like madmen.

They had sped a few miles down the shore when Charles saw the Chief suddenly rise in his seat, a dark colour mounting into his cheeks, his eyes shining. The boats swept round a wooded promontory into a little bay completely surrounded with islands; and there, high on the shore, rose the white stockade and buildings of Athabasca House. Towering above and behind it rose a shelving mass of red granite rock covered with a rich carpet of orange lichens and the white-washed fence and buildings of the fort stood out against the vivid colouring and the dark green of the woods. To one side rose the spire of a Protestant church and the cross of Father La Rone's mission. The red banner was flying high from its pole and the fort bell was clanging out a welcome that floated far out over the bay. The crews of the twelve boats gave a yell of joy and MacDonald's cap went up into the air. At the same

moment the wind dropped from the sails and the men, leaping to the oars, swept up to the fort, foam flying from the bows, the air ringing with their cheers.

All the people of the little settlement were crowded along the shore; and a little apart from the rest, on a high flat stone, stood the only white woman of the place: a tall graceful figure in a blue gown, the sunlight striking her fair shining hair and making a halo of it. She held a baby in her arms, and a little boy clung to her skirt and stared through golden curls at the wonderful sight.

The boat had scarcely touched the sand when MacDonald reached the rock with a mighty spring, and Charles turned his back upon them quickly to fumble among his baggage, and found Father La Rone wiping the tears from his face with his sleeve and muttering a *Te Deum*.

Charles had not been half an hour in Athabasca House before he understood why Chief Factor MacDonald was different from the other men who had been many years in the service: he had had always in his background the dream of this home he would one day build in the wilderness. And now it was his, a glorified place, lit with the eternal light of love and peace.

After the months of roughing it in the forest the first meal was a high function to the exiles. The dining-room of Athabasca House was not unlike that of Fort Garry with its heavy dishes, bare table and home-made chairs, but over the table there hung an atmosphere of sweet orderliness and gentle refinement. Old Bonhomme, the half-breed cook, waited upon the table with a very grand air indeed, and the Lady of Athabasca Lake sat opposite her husband with her little son in a high chair at her side and turned the bare old room into a banqueting hall.

There were two other clerks besides Charles; and Father La Rone made a fourth at the table beside the family.

The Priest was seated at the Chief's right hand, and Charles was next to the lady, and opposite the small boy

who regarded the strange young man shyly through his curls.

"Hector is not accustomed to meeting strangers," his mother said. "But we do love to have visitors, don't we, Sonny?"

"Ess," responded Hector. He looked steadily at Charles for a moment more, and then gave judgment softly:

"Hecta like dat stwanga."

"Hector has pronounced upon you, Mr. Stuart!" cried MacDonald. "Henceforth you may consider yourself one of the family."

As Father La Rone's quarters were not ready for him he was invited to spend the night at the fort, and he and Charles were ushered into the guest room; such a room as Charles had not seen since he left St. Andrew's. It had pictures on the wall, a fur rug on the floor, and a real feather bed covered with a snowy counterpane.

Father La Rone stood regarding its billowing whiteness, scratching his shaggy head in perplexity. Carefully and almost reverently he moved one of the white pillows and turned down a small corner of the covers.

"De sheet!" he whispered in awe. He carefully replaced everything and turned away shaking his head.

"You do as you please, my frien', but I sleep on de floor, me. Dat bed, she too—what you call?—celestial!"

"I'll do the same, me whatever," agreed Charles in the Red River vernacular.

So the Indian boy who served as a sort of bell-hop in this northern hostel, was despatched for their blankets, and they rolled themselves up and slept on the floor like true voyageurs, though Charles had an unconfessed desire to feel what a real bed with white sheets was like once more.

The day was spent in preparation for the next lap of the rebel's journey towards Siberia. MacDonald engaged a couple of Indians and a canoe to take him as far as Fort Thompson on Great Slave Lake, from which a boat

would be going down the Mackenzie to the headquarters of the district.

Coming up from the men's quarters, when all was settled, Charles heard sounds of a fierce altercation in the region of the fort kitchen. Old Bonhomme, the cook, and Duncan, one of the Scottish half-breeds who had been in the brigade, were holding a high argument. Bonhomme had announced with awe that two heavenly images had appeared that morning by a miracle in the chapel. When Father La Rone went over for early mass there they were, fallen from heaven. Bonhomme's honest brown eyes were filled with horror at the heretic Duncan's unbelief.

"Hoh! Eemiges!" he scoffed, "Waby-stig-wan he carry hissef from Norway. A'm help him over Portage La Loche wit dem, me myself. De angels bring dem! Hoh!"

After supper the officers were all invited to Mrs. MacDonald's sitting room. The room was big and bare but was somehow made to look cosy and had the intangible atmosphere of home. There were some books on a built-in shelf in the inglenook. There were bear skins and Hudson's Bay blankets for rugs and hangings, a bright fire crackled on the hearth, and in the centre of it all, the lady sat in her arm-chair, the firelight and candlelight meeting in the soft halo of her hair, and lighting up her lovely girlish face. MacDonald lounged on a broad fur-covered couch watching her as her fingers busied themselves with sewing a little garment, and the three other men sat and watched her, too, and did her homage in their hearts also for making them a home in the wilderness. Outside the wind whipped the lake into a foaming fury and the rain hissed against the window pane, but inside the charmed circle of the firelight all was warmth and cheer.

Charles found himself alone with her for a few minutes during the evening. His heart was yearning to hear her speak of Flora. She looked up from her work and caught his earnest longing gaze, and smiled encouragingly.

"I—I can't help staring at you," he ventured in a boyish apology. "We poor exiles hardly ever see anything

like you in this country. And I—we heard so much about you down at Red River. It was such a corking thing you did—coming all the way out here.”

“It was only a fine adventure,” she cried gleefully. “The hard part is often played by the women who have to wait long lonely years at home. And I didn’t come out alone, you know. My sister and her husband came with me, and little Flora Carmichael joined us at Toronto in Canada. Did you meet Flora in Red River?”

At last it had come! Charles felt a lump rising in his throat to choke him. He blushed up above the white line that showed where his voyageur cap began.

“Yes—yes—that is I—I met her,” he stammered.

“Oh, do tell me about her! I suppose she is a young woman now.” It was impossible for the lady not to notice that her guest was more than interested in the subject. She was suddenly struck with an illuminating thought. Could it be possible that this was the young man, himself, who had filled up so much of a letter her husband had brought her the night before?

“Why,” she cried, clapping her hands in girlish delight, “I do believe you must be the Young Chevalier!”

Charles was filled with a wild surmise. “How did you know?” he whispered.

“Oh, I am not so far removed from the world after all,” she laughed teasingly. “Come, tell me all about Flora! And Mrs. Murray, is she well?”

Charles drew his chair near her and found his tongue. Of course he did not try to describe Flora; Flora looking out from her beaver bonnet on Sunday morning; Flora in her blue silk gown, overflowed by a cascade of golden curls, sitting at the piano in the candlelight singing “Brignal Banks”; Flora on “Pelly Noir” riding along the King’s Highway like a young princess; that was impossible for mortal tongue. But somehow the wise lady of the Athabasca Lake managed to discover that these were the pictures that danced before his sight night and day.

Without his knowing it she found out more about him in

their half-hour by the fireside than her husband had in the intimacy of a two-months' voyage together. He even told about the ride they were to have taken on the afternoon he was banished, and she guessed a great deal more than he told.

And she listened with the sympathy his mother would have shown and the words she spoke were like balm to the lonely boy's heart.

She spoke, as her husband had, of the long way round that sometimes had to be taken, but to the true and the brave it always led home. She glanced proudly out into the hall where MacDonald was standing talking to his apprentice clerks. "My husband had to wait long years for the home he longed for. He had to travel hundreds of miles and explore many lakes and rivers as a sort of apprenticeship."

"But that was nothing when he knew you were waiting for him," said Charles as he rose reluctantly to say good-night.

She smiled. "Are you quite sure there isn't some one waiting for you?" she asked. "There always is for the man who is true to the best. Good-night, Monsieur Chevalier, rest well, and do try that nice feather bed; I am so proud of it."

He was away early the next morning with his two Indian guides in their birch-bark canoe. The whole household were down to the shore to wish him Godspeed. The last sight of the fort as he rounded an island showed him the Lady of the Lake standing by her husband's side high on the shore, waving her handkerchief. He saluted reverently. Perhaps he dimly guessed her high office. For here was another Angel stationed on guard at one of the places in his life where its bulwarks might not be strong; a radiant, lovely Angel, strong and immovable, holding the white shield of Home. For she, too, had been "given charge over him."

CHAPTER XXI

A Husband for Madame Hawkins

TWO Indians and one birch-bark canoe were a poor substitute for the rollicking, singing, dancing, voyageurs with their twelve long York boats. But this was the equipment Cameron had intended for the rebel on the whole journey, and Charles blessed Marie Rose many times in the raw wet days and chill nights as he was paddled silently down the Great Slave River. He missed the gay nonsense of the Metis tripmen; the Indians were quiet and stolid, and pushed swiftly onward, for the short summer was almost gone and the nights were cold and foggy. Young Thunder was the high-sounding title of his steersman, a stalwart Chipewyan with a stately sad demeanour, while the other man went by the undistinguished name of "Oskineque," a word meaning "The Young Man," and as the two were inseparable, Charles gave the latter the complimentary title of "Young Lightning."

On their second day, paddling down the winding river, between tall dark lines of forest, they rounded a point, and came upon a black bear swimming across their bows. Charles had seen very little game on that long journey, for the huge, yelling, splashing, singing serpent that twisted its way up the rivers when the brigade was on a trip frightened all wild creatures miles away from their noisy track. He gave a boyish shout at the unusual sight and grabbed his gun. As the canoe shot within range Lightning made a lunge at Bruin with his axe. He struck but only wounded the animal, and the huge brute reared itself furiously against them. Young Thunder, in the stern, was nearest the enraged animal, and was so intent upon saving the canoe from being overturned that he had

no chance to save himself. The bear caught his arm with a sweep of his terrible paw, but at the same instant Charles's rifle spoke, and Bruin sank slowly into the water.

Young Thunder made light of his hurt, but Charles insisted upon making camp early, and while Lightning fried bear steak for supper he bound up the wounded arm. The next day he took one of the paddles himself, thereby cementing a friendship that was to serve him in a later evil hour.

At Fort Thompson, on Great Slave Lake, he had to part with his Indian guides. From here a boat was going across the lake and down the Mackenzie River with fish to Fort Mackenzie, the headquarters of the district, where Charles was to report. With many handshakes and presents of knives and tobacco he bade farewell to his friends. The Company's boat was in charge of a young apprentice clerk like himself and was manned by a half-dozen half-breed and Indian boatmen. It was good to have the company of a white man again. Templeton was a jolly fellow who railed at the Company night and day and whistled and sang as though it were the finest service in the world.

The forest was bare of foliage, the nights and mornings were frosty, and the days filled with chill rains by the time they sailed down upon Fort Mackenzie. It stood in a clearing, high upon a steep rocky bank, ringed by the dark forest. In the centre of the square before the Chief Factor's house stood a little lookout post with a stairway leading up to it. Here a half-breed was hurriedly running up the flag and a bell in the little tower was clanging forth their welcome to the northern fortress.

Seated at the mess table an hour later Charles felt a glow of joy in the comradeship of his fellows again.

There were four officers belonging to the place and two or three others from outlying posts. The Chief Factor was a genial fellow, a child of the Company, having a full-breed mother and a half-breed wife. Next to Charles sat a young man named Percival, an apprentice clerk towards whom his heart warmed, for he looked and acted like

Johnny McBain. There was Ogilvie, a great naturalist, whose name stood high in the annals of the Smithsonian Institute, who was over Fort Radisson far down in the Barren Lands; and there was an old brown and wrinkled giant who was post-master in the Company's farthest post down the Mackenzie.

The food was good, but served without ceremony. It was a rough bachelor existence they lived at Fort Mackenzie, far removed from the refined atmosphere of Athabasca House.

"Now, Mr. Stuart, pour out your news!" cried the Bourgeois, when they had drunk the health of this latest arrival. "You're straight from Fort Garry and ought to know everything!"

They plied him with questions. How was old Murder? Who was the last man he had knocked down? When was Governor McTavish coming back? And what was in store for MacNeill when he returned? Did he meet "Chatake" Melbourne at Norway? "Chatake" was out with his gun to bring down something rich in the way of promotion. MacNeill was his uncle and had schemed to get him placed at Fort Garry, etc., etc.

Charles answered all the questions he could with safety. He related the circumstances of his introduction to Mr. Melbourne, and it was received with a hilarity that showed the "Pelican" was not very popular at Fort Mackenzie. But he had much to conceal regarding Cameron, at least, and he preferred to listen, especially while Ogilvie talked.

He was one of those great men whom the Company did not want, because he cared more for birds and insects and shells and stones than he did for beaver skins, and he knew far more about the habits of the caribou and the seal than he did about their pelts.

His tales opened up a new world to Charles: his pet golden eagle, captured near Fort Radisson; the wise old wild gander that went honking drearily up and down in search of its lost mate, never to be comforted by taking another; the plucky sand-hill crane that would fight a man

if wounded; the sagacious grebe that made her nest in the reeds so that it would rise and fall with the water; the trumpeter swan and Franklin's gull, that beautiful rosy-feathered creature—Ogilvie made them almost human.

They did not talk "Musquash"—Company business—at the table where Ogilvie dined, but they lived the romance of the wild life about them which so many had failed to see.

"And the Company wants to abandon Fort Radisson!" he cried, after telling of the treasures of the short hot summer. "Now, Mr. Stuart, put yourself in my place. Would you abandon a Fort you had worked up yourself, if it were at all possible to continue it?"

"Yes, sir," cried Charles heartily, "I'd abandon the whole Hudson's Bay Company to-day, if I hadn't signed a contract for five years."

Chief Factor MacPherson's mild brown eyes regarded the young man kindly. He had seen many such come up from the south, raging under the injustice of their sentence.

"After all it's a great service, the Company," he said. "Stick to it, you young fellows. If you stay long enough you'll find it worth while."

They were MacDonald's words. Charles pondered them.

"The Louchou Indians on the other side of the Yukon Mountains," Ogilvie was saying now, "have a very practical way of choosing their brides. When a brave takes a fancy to a young lady he just grabs her by the hair and marches her off to his lodge. When two men take a fancy to the same lady the result is rather painful."

"Pretty hard on the belles, I should say," remarked the Chief. "Hey, Taylor, that's where you ought to go!"

Old Tom Taylor, the lean leathern postmaster from the Arctic coast, was bent upon a second venture into matrimony. His Indian wife had died the winter before and his half-breed family were scattered. Old Tom shook his

head. "No more Injun women for me," he growled. Though Old Tom was as brown as any Red Skin, he was a pure white, and never lost an opportunity to heap profane abuse upon the heads of all half-breeds, his own family included.

"A white wife for me or nothing," he said determinedly.

Some imp of mischief brought to Charles's mind Madame Hawkins of the Red River steamer and her ambition to marry an officer of the Company. Here was the very man of her dreams. To be sure, a postmaster was scarcely considered an officer. The position was generally filled by some old and trusted servant of the Company. But Madame Commodore would not know the difference. "Postmaster Taylor of Fort Yukon" was quite a high-sounding title and it might be potent enough to bring her all the way from the Red River. Why not write now and send the letter out with the winter packet, he proposed, giving such a gilded description of Madame's grace and beauty that Old Tom was persuaded.

So the three young men got out their goose quills after mess, and a letter was concocted, couched in the most alluring terms, while the future bridegroom nervously looked on, uttering a sheepish protest when the language grew too ornamental.

The fort held high carnival that night; a double celebration, to mark the arrival of the men from Fort Thompson and the departure of Ogilvie for the North. There was greater excess here than in Halliday's "celebrations" at Fort Garry. The chief grew maudlin and wept and declared that he loved them all. Templeton, the visitor, got up to dance the sword dance and almost fell into the fire, while the old leathern giant from the Arctic grew fiercely quarrelsome.

Charles had a hazy idea the next morning that he had been the most foolish of them all. He remembered that he had tried to sing and play the fiddle and dance at the

same time, and had held a hot dispute with the stately Ogilvie over something in the Shorter Catechism. He was deeply ashamed.

"Sorry to see you go," the genial Chief Factor said that afternoon when Charles was ready to start for Fort Hearne. He was very kind, and the exile had an uncomfortable feeling that he was sorry for him. "You oughtn't to be sent to that place. Chatake Melbourne left without notifying me; decided not to return when he was down at Norway House, but as MacNeill's nephew he is safe. You'll like Fraser, he's your clerk, and he's in charge just now. Poor Fraser's rather down on his luck. I hope you'll hit it off."

CHAPTER XXII

An Island Prison

THE canoe journey from Fort Mackenzie to Fort Hearne, situated far up at the end of the northern arm of the Great Slave Lake, could ordinarily be accomplished in about four days. But the heavy fogs of the early autumn, alternating with lashing wind storms and cold driving rains, delayed Charles and his two half-breed companions, and it was a week before they paddled up to the rocky island where the fort was built.

It was a grey, lowering day, and Charles viewed his lone prison-house through a cold slanting rain; four low log buildings, set in a rocky clearing, surrounded by stunted spruce and small jack pines. The whole population of the place—men, women, children and dogs—were out in the rain to meet the new master. Fort Hearne, having an abundance of fish, was made the wintering place of many of the married boatmen, and a half-dozen men were at the shore, the shawled heads of their wives and swarms of half-naked children dodging about behind them. The place was untidy and dirty, and smelled to the grey heavens of decayed fish.

As Charles stepped from the canoe he looked about eagerly for the officer over the fort; for upon him depended all his hopes of companionship. But there was no white man in the dark-skinned group at the shore. A slim, brown, half-breed, with kind, dog-like eyes—the interpreter of the fort—seemed to be the one in charge. The new master shook hands with him and he smiled happily.

"Name Jasper," he volunteered. Then making a gesture towards the fort building, "M'sieu Frase'," he explained cheerfully, "he mak' de beeg spree. De boy dey

all go for fight, every day, all togedder. A'm glad you come, me."

They walked up to the fort, Charles's heart going farther down into his moccasins at each step. His own apartments were in the central building, which like all the others, was of log with a low spruce-bark roof. The door opened into a big, barn-like place, which was the Indian hall and office. It had a rough table, some benches, a very dirty floor and a huge fireplace. Though the climate called loudly for stoves, Fort Hearne was too far north for such a luxury. A sort of office bedroom opened off the room, and another door led to a kitchen and a room where the old cook and his wife had their abode.

That useful person, a gaunt old Yellow Knife Indian, shuffled in from the kitchen with a tin plate of boiled fish and a mug of black tea, which he set upon the dirty table. The fish was fresh and Charles was young and hungry, and after he had eaten heartily he called the interpreter and started out to view his prison.

Dirt, disorder and vermin had taken up their habitation in the rooms which were his, and he guessed that the rest of the premises would be no better. As he stepped out into the fishy air the old cook came to the kitchen door and called the dogs.

"Hi! Keeskiouse! Ro-vare! Hi, Rouge! Hi, Waby!" The dogs came walloping up from the shore and he flung the tin dinner plates to them. When they were licked clean he gave them a wipe with some dry moss that hung beside the kitchen door, and stacked them up on the shelf for the next meal.

To the right and left of Charles's house were the fur and provision stores, and running along the back of the enclosure was the long, low shanty where the six men and their families were housed. Fraser and his family had apartments by themselves in connection with the provision store and Charles walked over to this first, to view what manner of man was to be his companion for the coming long winter. Jasper trotted after him, explaining in a

voluble mixture of Yellow Knife, Indian, French, and English profanity how the Diable had been ruling in Fort Hearne since the day of "de beeg spree."

There had been an epidemic of sore throats, it seemed, starting with the children. Fraser's Indian wife and a little boy had been very ill and Fraser had had access to the rum for medicine.

Charles marched into Fraser's room without ceremony. The place was filthy and disorderly, and smelled worse than the dead fish on the shore. In a corner on a bunk lay the white man. His Indian wife, a woman from the neighbouring Yellow Knife tribe, her blanket around her, sat on the floor near him, her baby in her arms, and a little brown, naked boy scurried to shelter behind her as the stranger appeared. All the pent-up rage against his fate burning in Charles's heart burst forth; he administered a disgusted kick to the prostrate figure in the bunk, but feeling that his moccasined foot was not a sufficiently severe rebuke, he caught the man by the collar of his shirt and shook him vigorously.

"You drunken beast," he muttered. The man opened his eyes and looked at him stupidly. Under the marks of dissipation his face showed a gentle refinement.

"Ah, glad see you," he said, in a soft, cultivated voice. "Hope make self comfor'ble."

Feeling he had done the honours of the fort, he proceeded to doze again.

"You're a fine specimen to be left in charge of a post!" Charles shouted, "I've a mind to dump you into the lake. You certainly need it."

"Tha's all right, ole fellow," answered the victim in his gentle, musical voice. "Thanks, awf'ly. Same to you."

Fortunately the silly, drunken attempt at politeness stirred Charles's sense of humour. He laughed, shoved the man back into his bunk with no gentle hand and turned away.

He was afraid to even look into the men's apartments, but Jasper led the way thither, greatly enjoying the new

master's methods. Here house-keeping was on a very simple scale. A pot of fish kept boiling over the fire and the family rolled in blankets on the floor to sleep spelled everything in the way of food and lodging. As he had feared, dirt and disorder reigned. He barely glanced inside the shanties, but talked to the men a little, distributed presents in the lavish way that he had, and then returned to look over the books. Melbourne, the Pelican, had left in the spring, and Fraser had taken charge, but there seemed to be no change in the confused muddle the books presented for months back.

The early northern night came down and he pored over them with a sputtering candle for an hour and then went to his ill-smelling bed in a black despondency that would surely have satisfied even the rage of the two men who had banished him.

Fraser appeared on the third day. He apologised in a gentle, diffident way.

"Sorry you found me making such a particular ass of myself, Mr. Stuart," he said, coming down to the shore in the afternoon where Charles was overseeing the fishing operations. "It was rotten for you."

Charles looked at him keenly as they shook hands. He noted the flabby cheek, the rough, unkempt beard stained with tobacco juice, the untidy clothes. But he could not help noticing also that the man's eyes were tragic and appealing.

Marcus Fraser's father was a well-known Divine, a minister of the Established Church of Scotland, and Marcus, himself, was an Oxford graduate. But he had gone down under the influence of ten years' monotonous clerkship in the Hudson's Bay Company. He had drifted from post to post and had finally been caught in the slow eddy of this northern fort. And here he was in his fifth year at Fort Hearne with a wife from the neighbouring Yellow Knife tribe and a couple of little Yellow Knife papooses.

Charles's indignation died, he felt instead a deep pity for the man who had been worsted in the fight. He ex-

perienced also a sudden pang of apprehension. This was what banishment to this lone post might do for a man. In Fraser he saw himself, years hence, discouraged and beaten. All his fighting instincts rose to combat the doleful prophecy.

The exile knew instinctively that his only hope lay in hard work. He was desperately afraid of idleness, of time hanging on his hands, when he would have nothing to do but think of the highway winding down by the Red River, or the old grey house set in its garden in far-off St. Andrew's.

He plunged into work. He took up housekeeping as well as bookkeeping. He went through the dirty old fort like a cleansing fire, and had all the men and women scrubbing and cleaning and scouring in an astonishing manner, and all in the best spirits too, with plenty of fun and laughter and throwing of water at each other, for every one succumbed at once to the Young Chevalier's charm and was already his obedient servant.

Fraser sometimes remonstrated feebly. "There's really nothing to get into a perspiration about; you know, old fellow," he said soothingly, when Charles raged around the fort because the fishermen were half an hour late starting out one morning.

"It really doesn't matter, after all, whether the work's done this morning or the week after next. The winter's long enough."

But Charles's abounding energy was not to be quenched, and Fraser found himself caught in its impetuous stream.

His first care he found to be the fishing, for the season was at its height. The lake was stocked with the finest whitefish and the men brought them in bursting nets and cast them in gleaming, quivering heaps upon the shore. The women, squatted on the ground, strung them in tens on sticks, doing it very deftly with a single strike of the sharpened stake through the tail. All day the work went on, and the dogs and gulls came and gorged themselves on the discarded suckers and jack fish.

The strung fish were then hung in silvery fringes to dry, high on the stages beyond the reach of the dogs and other prowling animals. Here they swung in the sun and wind and rain till they were needed in the winter. When the season was warm and they alternately froze and thawed they often acquired a rather high flavour.

Charles was now in desperate straits for something to do. The little clearing on the rocky island, the oval bay surrounded by its ring of forest seemed to be the whole world, far removed from the planet where human beings moved. After the free far-reaching spaces of the prairie the ring of forest seemed like a prison wall, and he took to making mad purposeless excursions far out beyond it, over the grey stormy lake, or into the bare stunted growth of pines, only to find the ring closing tighter.

Another prison wall was being reared around him, the icy bands of winter. The Indians who had been coming about the forts went off to their traps. The great procession of wild fowl that had gone honking and calling through the grey skies ceased, a great silence fell over the desolate land. The lake froze over, and day after day the snow came down in blinding storms. The sun, which had been working such long, long hours all summer, began to cut down his hours of labour until he did not rise until nearly ten o'clock in the morning and set again at two in the afternoon. The Arctic winter was upon them.

Cutting and hauling the next winter's wood from the forest was the only work for the men. All the wood for the present use was piled in great walls about the fort and had been dried during the summer. Charles went off with the men and the dog sleighs far into the forest, where larger timber could be obtained. He found he could not keep either himself or the men busy with the task. For they could cut and haul the amount allotted for a week's work in a couple of days and were accustomed to lie about the fire gambling for the rest of the time.

The young Chief doubled their task, while Fraser gently demurred.

"It's obviously impossible to keep them busy," he said in his listless way, "unless you order the whole forest belt cut down. When you've been here as long as I have, your problem will not be how to get a great deal of work done, but how to make it last as long as possible."

Nevertheless, Fraser was gradually yielding to his young Chief's energy. Charles was always making swift journeys with the dogs out into the woods to see what the men were doing, or far into the forest for a cache of fresh meat, and he insisted upon Fraser accompanying him. He was keeping a firm hand on the key that locked away their rum rations, too, and did not want his clerk to have time to brood over his privations.

Fraser had once been a skilful boxer and fencer, and every evening he was dragged ruthlessly from his comfortable fireside to take part in a bout. It was all very trying to his relaxed muscles and indolent spirit, but he was finding his restless companion harder to resist every day.

December came and brought the first break in the drear monotony of their days. The Barren Ground reindeer swept past them on their autumn migration from the Arctic coast to the shelter of their winter quarters in the forest.

Charles was busy one morning in the office, looking over the book that never failed to interest him; the diary of the fort, which was always kept by the man in charge, and carefully preserved for reference. Some of the entries were amusing, and Charles was smiling over one when Doggie, the Indian boy who was general factotum about the place, suddenly appeared in his silent Indian fashion.

"Master, caribou come," he announced. Charles seized his gun and ran out to the gate in great excitement, shouting for Fraser. The men were all away at the wood-cutting except Jasper and the Cook, and they came running to harness the dogs. Already the brutes were making

an uproar, wild to get away. Charles slipped on his snowshoes and ran out ahead. The vanguard of the great army had appeared; a party of about fifty came out of the dark woods, stately and beautiful, and stepped out upon the lake. Jasper and Doggie, coming up with the dogs, gave a shout, and the lovely creatures reared up on their hind legs as lightly as though they had been blown by the wind. The whole great host were visible now on the edge of the forest, and the men set out madly in pursuit, Jasper driving and yelling "Saprees" and "Diables" at his leaping teams. The caribou seemed the only creatures who did not share the excitement. They were coming on now, hundreds and hundreds of them, appearing for a few moments to cross the little bay and disappearing again into the darkness of the forest.

The sleigh dashed over a piece of ice the wind had left bare. The dogs, leaping forward, mad for the chase, swung clear around, upset the sleigh, and Charles and Fraser rolled over in the snow, while their steeds tore across the lake alone, with Jasper, Doggie, and the old cook yelling behind.

They all came back to the fort laughing and hungry. Thousands of the caribou would fall to the guns and snares of the Indians, but the five hunters brought home only one, the spoil of Jasper's gun.

"I'm glad the men were away," Fraser said, as he and Charles sat at their dinner of venison steak. "I couldn't shoot one of those lovely creatures unless I were starving."

For the first time Charles felt respect for Fraser struggling up in his heart. He, too, had found it impossible to point a gun at those graceful things gambolling, unafraid, on their way to the safety of the forest.

After this brief luxury of excitement the winter dragged away on leaden feet. Charles put in as many hours as possible reading the few books he had found in the fort, but the period of daylight was short and the candle-grease so precious that even this indulgence was strictly limited.

He consumed many hours in the luxury of writing let-

ters, for the winter packet would go out in December. He wrote a few lines every day in a voluminous letter to his mother, cheerful lines, with the heartache and the loneliness carefully concealed. And he wrote something of another letter, too; he dared not make it very long, but he destroyed one day what he had written the day before, so that the delightful task was never finished.

But one could not read and write all the time, and some days Charles was a perfect demon of restlessness, keeping Fraser in a state of hurried discomfort with his boxing and fencing and his mad excursions into the wilds.

One day, taking Jasper as interpreter, he made a longer trip than usual into the woods, where the Chief of the Yellow Knives had his lodge. He brought tea and tobacco and some other presents, and was received with great pomp and ceremony. As he sat on the ground in the Chief's lodge, eating out of the steaming pot, the flap of the wigwam was suddenly raised, a familiar voice cried, "Ho, Boy! Waby-stig-wan," and in strode his old comrades, Thunder and Lightning.

It was a joyous meeting. Charles hunted out some special gifts of knives and tobacco from his mustabout. Young Thunder made a stately address, which Jasper interpreted. He reminded Waby-stig-wan of the service done him in the encounter with the bear. "When the Master goes to the Lake of the Marshes again," he said, "we will be his guides."

The two convoyed Charles by a shorter route back to the shore of the lake within a few miles of the fort. Charles ran across the white expanse in the night, with the Aurora Borealis shooting above him in inconceivable glory. He was dumb with wonder at the grandeur of its shifting lights—green and rose and gold and blue and silver—and at their strange swishing rustling sound as though the heavens were closed in swirling silken garments. He dared not pause in the biting air to contemplate the glory. An unseen hand, deadly chill, hovered above the travellers to clutch the man who lingered. But Jasper begged for a halt.

"De bell, M'sieu," he explained in distress. "De bell, she mak de speerit mad, an' de Diable, he mak de noise."

Charles understood and yielded. Jasper shared the common superstition that the bells on the dogs' harness made the celestial commotion more violent. They were taken off and stowed in the bag, and the sceptical white man was forced to confess that the mad revelry of the heavens seemed to grow quieter.

Charles made a desperate attempt to stir up something of a festive spirit at Christmas and the New Year. He dressed up Jasper as Santa Claus and had him fill the youngsters' stockings, and they had dog races and a big dinner of roast goose and venison. He even ventured to initiate old Father Abraham, as they called the cook, into the mysteries of making a New Year's pudding, which resulted in a gluey, brown mess which they ate with great zest, and they had a dance in the Indian Hall, with spruce decorations and a wild extravagance of fish-oil lamps. Charles led off with Fraser's wife, who was fat and shapeless and overcome with embarrassed giggles, while Fraser followed with Mrs. Jasper, and they all had a very happy time indeed.

And still the short days and the endless nights dragged on, nights when Charles could not sleep for lack of sufficient exercise. Nights when he lay and thought of all he had missed; thought of the girl at the Red River who had probably forgotten him, of his mother who was wearying for him, of poor Marie Rose, with her stricken eyes, as he had seen her that night paddling away into the shadows. A wolf would howl from the heights above the clearing, and the dogs would all answer, and then the artillery of the frost would give out thundering detonations, as though the foundations of the fort were being rent asunder, and still he tossed from side to side, weary with idleness.

At last the one great event of the winter came. The winter packet, the mail that came up by dog train from the south, was due at Fort Thompson, on the other side of the lake, and it was the duty of the man in charge of Fort

Hearne to go after it. There were two ways of crossing the lake: one was the Grand Traverse, straight south as an arrow would go—a journey which could be accomplished in two days. The other, around by the shore, following every indent and bay of the jagged coast line, would consume almost two weeks, but was safe, while the Grand Traverse was risky; unless the weather remained clear there was great danger of being lost.

It was characteristic of Charles that he chose the Grand Traverse. He wanted to run hard and straight for that packet. There would be a letter in it from Archie and there would be news of Flora.

The dogs were brought out and dressed in their best harness with bright ribbons and bells. He had a fine team of dogs, picked from the best the fort could produce. He had driven them all winter and had given them the names of the men in the service who had impressed him most. The plump, cheery fellow who came with wagging tail when the harness was brought out was named Ross, after the genial host of Lower Fort Garry. MacNeill was the name given to the one that was never to be trusted, and that always sneaked away behind the corral when it was time for him to be harnessed. The sulky brute that snarled and bit on all sides was dubbed "Old Murder," the name Cameron being sacred to Charles; and his favourite, the tall, strong patient leader, was called MacDonald. Charles found something very soothing to his chafed spirit in being able to yell anathemas at MacNeill and call Old Murder ill names as he flew across the snow.

Charles and Jasper started off in the dusk of the afternoon, intending to travel by night and use the day for making camp and sleeping. They sped away into the whirling glory of the winter night, but they had not gone far before the dancing lights of heaven disappeared and a blinding mist hid all landmarks. After a long night of wandering they came upon a point of land jutting into the lake. The pale, chill dawn was displaying the bleak landscape, and they found they had travelled in a circle

and were standing on a cape almost visible from the door of the fort.

So the Grand Traverse had failed. There was nothing to do now but to go patiently around by the shore, and Charles remembered MacDonald's words as they strolled beside Playgreen lake that summer evening that now seemed so far away. The journey was long and toilsome, with wolves always loping along at a safe distance behind, and sitting patiently on their haunches when they camped.

His old acquaintance, Templeton, spied the dog-train far off and had his flag flying in welcome. He came running down the long tunnel of snow to the fort gate as they swept up with a gay jingle of bells.

The three white men at Fort Thompson were starving for company and wanted to talk, but they mercifully gave Charles time to look over his mail as he sat steaming before the fire. There was a pile of papers to be laid aside for future use, and a glorious package of letters addressed to "Apprentice Clerk Charles Edward Stuart, Fort Garry or Elsewhere." Charles shrugged sarcastically. "Or Elsewhere" would likely be his address for the next four years. He scrambled through his mother's letters first, just to see that she was well and happy, and then he tore open Archie's, a curious lump in his throat at the sight of the familiar handwriting. But he could not take time to peruse the long, newsy pages. He was searching greedily for one item of news without which all the rest was blank. He read on and on. Archie was so lonely . . . had been to church. . . . Johnny McBain . . . MacNeill. . . . He had a Buffalo runner, had ridden him to the Lower Fort. . . . The second Ross girl, the one with the red hair, was married to . . . Hang it! What did he care whom the second Ross girl married? Why couldn't Archie come to the point? Ah! here it was at last! Yes, he had ridden down the Highway that very afternoon that Charles had left and met Miss Carmichael, and she had given him the enclosed note the next time he saw her.

The note! Charles snatched at the little scrap of paper,

dropping Archie's letter in a whirling cloud, and Templeton, smoking impatiently on the other side of the fire till his visitor was ready to talk again, looked up quickly:

"Not bad news I hope, Mr. Stuart?"

"No, oh, no! Good—I—I think—I'm not sure," said Charles, clutching the little perfumed note. And then he knew it was the best news in the world. She had not forgotten him.

"Dear Monsieur Chevalier: It seems that the fates have decreed that we must not ride together. The first time you suggested it you were banished to the Badger Holes, the second time you were sent to the ends of the earth. There must be some bad luck about it." It ran on gaily. Pelly Noir was behaving like a gentleman, and Burk sent his respects. Kildonan Church was filled and Mr. Black preached grand sermons. Her aunt had not been very well; they were living very quietly. . . . Mr. Sinclair had told her all about his trouble and she considered Chief Factor MacNeill a tyrant, and she had turned Jacobite, and she and Mr. Sinclair were always singing,

"Wha wadna fecht for Charlie?
Wha wadna draw the sword?"

Charles's eyes were shining when he folded the letter, putting Archie's into his coat pocket and the little note inside the inner pocket of his deerskin shirt.

"The news was good, all right," remarked Templeton. "Have you fallen into an estate, or got your commission, or what?"

For all he was a hardened voyageur, Charles blushed boyishly. He might have answered that he had just received something far greater than the rulers of Rupert's Land could give him.

It was a wonderful visit. They talked and feasted and held a high carnival of sports, ending up with racing their dog teams, a performance which resulted in a raging, howling tangle of dogs and harness, out of which Old Murder

was dragged hanging fiercely to the throat of MacNeill, and was only with whip and voice prevented from putting an end to his fellow-traveller.

On the third afternoon Charles left for home. He did not attempt the Grand Traverse on the return journey. He was not in such mad haste now, but he ran swiftly, his feet winged with joy and hope. He came sweeping up to the fort one afternoon, setting all the dogs barking and every one came running out to welcome him back. Fraser ran far down the trail, Father Abraham and Doggie at his heels. The fort was in perfect order, and Fraser was proud and happy over its spotless efficiency.


It was some time before Charles was able to sit down and give his undivided attention to his letters. There was one from Johnny McBain which he hadn't even opened at Fort Thompson. Poor Johnny had fallen upon evil days. Norway House had been a mad house, he declared, for weeks after the Athabasca Brigade had left. Old Murder had used his fists on two of his fellow-officers, and every one knew that next summer when the Council met, he would have to be sent home to an asylum. Of course it was mostly on account of Marie Rose. He hadn't been a human being since she disappeared. Johnny supposed, rather fatuously, that Charles had heard all about it, but, fortunately, went on to tell it nevertheless.

The day after the Athabasca Brigade sailed the Western men had left, and Cameron sent Marie Rose with them to Fort Saskatchewan to marry McRae. The fellows all said she didn't want to go—Charles possibly knew why, the writer interpolated. Anyway, when the brigade got up the river beyond Carlton House, near where her grandmother's people lived, she went off in a canoe with some of them one night and had never been heard of since.

Charles sat alone by his smouldering fire and lived again that sunny afternoon when the Athabasca men passed the Westerners camped high on the bank of the Saskatchewan. He saw again that little lone figure poised on the rock, waving the bright shawl. And that had been Marie Rose!

She had been signalling him for help probably, and he had sailed past her without even a word of comfort or cheer. He leaned forward, his head in his hands, his big boy-heart heavy and sick.

And so the little wild rose had gone back to the wilderness where it rightly belonged. He wondered what had been her fate; the favourite squaw of some young hunter, likely; treated as a slave, made to carry the burdens and clean the furs! He felt the stinging tears spring to his eyes at the thought. Poor, little Marie Rose!



CHAPTER XXIII

The Pelican Again

WINTER lingered long in the lap of Great Slave Lake, and Spring crept up slowly and shyly. Her first heralds were the great fringes of massive icicles that grew down from the low eaves, glittering in the weak sunshine, and alternately melting and freezing until a serried wall of stalagmites arose to meet the dripping stalactites, until the little log fort looked like a fairy crystal palace.

After many cold foggy days and much drizzling rain the sun's leisurely circuit across the sky proclaimed summer.

When the Indian trade opened up Young Thunder and Young Lightning were among the first to come out of the wilderness bearing their winter's harvest.

"Go Rabisca Lake?" Young Thunder enquired with a quick gesture towards the south.

Charles shook his head. "No, no trip south for me for many moons yet, Young Thunder. But when I go you and Lightning go with me, I promise." And smiling and satisfied the two went back to their camp.

When the spring trade was over, furs had to be cleaned, hammered and packed for the journey to Fort Mackenzie, and the women, children and dogs prepared to go with the brigade as far as Big Island, a sort of fashionable sea-side resort where the ladies of the Fort spent the summer while their voyageur husbands and sons went down to Portage la Loche.

These were very busy days for the two officers. Fraser went about his work with all his might, whistling cheerily. It was impossible for Charles not to notice the great change in his companion. A new life had come to Fraser. He followed his young chief about like a child, as eager to

help as he had been heretofore anxious to avoid exertion. And watching him day after day, Charles put away his aching longing for a change, and set his hand to the door that was to open and release Fraser from his long imprisonment.

"Marcus," he said one day, as they tied their last bale with strings of shaganappy, "I want you to go down to Fort Mackenzie in charge of the boats."

For a minute Fraser did not answer. It was long since he had had one of his silent, moody spells, and Charles glanced up enquiringly; then he turned away to his work quickly, dismayed to see tears standing in the other man's eyes! Fraser walked to the door and stood for a few minutes. For years a craving to get back among men of his kind had been with him night and day; it had been followed by a dull hopelessness and finally by a loss of all ambition. But he had been changing unconsciously in the past winter. The warm breath of friendship and helpfulness had been blowing over his soul; little buds of hope and joy had begun shyly to peep forth; the long winter was nearly over. This sudden view of springtime, through the door held ajar by the hand of a friend, had moved him beyond self-control.

He came back in a few moments master of himself.

"Thank you, Stuart," he said in his usual quiet manner. "It's corking of you. But I couldn't think of accepting. I haven't been exactly used to such generosity in the service, and you rather bowled me over, don't you know!"

"You old humbug," cried Charles huskily, "you're going, or I'll report you to McPherson for insubordination."

They argued the matter for a day, but Charles had his way. The little brigade had a royal send-off. Father Abraham cooked a special dinner of wild goose and duck, Doggie ran up the flag and the boats shoved off with a rousing cheer, Fraser sitting in the stern of the last one, with a light in his eyes. Fort Hearne had never seen before. Charles stood on the shore with his depleted staff to wave

farewell. Jasper, who acted as guide, struck up gaily the old chanson, sung wherever oar or paddle was swung on the lakes and rivers of Rupert's Land:

"En roulant, ma boule roulant!"

The men caught up the song, and for the first time in many years the Fort Hearne boats swept out over Great Slave Lake in time to music.

The long sunny days dragged as slowly as the winter nights. Charles missed the noise of the children, and especially of Fraser's little brown boy. The mosquitoes and black flies made life a misery and spurred to constant activity, though there was little to do. He worked in the rocky garden he had ordered dug behind the fort, and was rewarded by seeing his potatoes come bravely to the surface, only to be struck down by an early frost. He went fishing and landed a sixty-pound trout that was so coarse and strong it could not be eaten. He could not bear to take out his gun. The swampy meadows at the back of the fort on the mainland were one vast nest of birds, that made a sweet crooning all the long twilight of the short night. It would be like taking a gun into a nursery. So it was a task to fill up the long days.

He rigged up a cricket ground on the rocky sward between the fort-fence and the lake. It was terribly rough, but he taught Abraham, and even Sarah, to play and had something like sport in a feeble way and a great deal of laughter.

The few men who were left were employed filling up the cracks in the log walls with mud, tightening windows and doors, looking after the flues, and getting ready for the winter, which, even in the midst of summer, was upon them.

The days were hot and long and there was sunshine, as the summer advanced, until ten o'clock at night. Still, there was frost when the sun disappeared. Charles wrote in the diary on July the first the interesting item: "Ice

formed last night on the edge of the bay, while pieces of last year's ice still linger on the north side of the Island."

It was undoubtedly Autumn, though still August, when Fraser came back, bright-eyed, and looking like a new man. He was like a child home from his first visit to the city and wanted to tell all the wonders of his great trip. But he had brought the mail that had come up with the Portage la Loche Brigade, and Charles would neither speak nor be spoken to till he had gone through his letters.

First his mother's, just to see that she was well; and next Archie's, or that which Archie's contained, rather. For there it was—the little pink note! Indeed it had grown into quite a lengthy letter. Charles's skies were as radiant as the Northern Lights ever painted the heavens. It was almost worth being banished to get a letter like that. Tales of Flora MacDonald and the Young Chevalier danced through his head. Did she think of them too? He read her letter a half-dozen times and then picked up Archie's from where it had fallen unheeded, and his Aurora display faded under grey storm-clouds.

"We've got a splendid new man down at the Lower Fort," Archie wrote, after giving the news of Fort and Settlement, and how Dufresne had beaten Geordie at checkers. "He's a fine chap, invites me and Ferguson down often. His name's Melbourne and he's just come down from your country up there. He was sent to the Mackenzie by Governor McTavish for less than MacNeill banished you, he says. He can snap his fingers at the Governor though, because MacNeill's his uncle and he is also some relation, through his mother, to Chief Factor Murray's Indian wife. He spends a great deal of his time at Kildonan, and rides out with Miss Carmichael. The fellows here all say they are to be married, but one can never tell."

It was some time before Charles succeeded in reading his other letters intelligently after this disastrous piece of news.

There was an important letter from Chief Factor McPherson, the head of Fort Mackenzie, stating that Charles was to remain indefinitely at Fort Hearne. It appeared that the mills of the gods at Norway House were to continue to grind the rebel slowly and exceeding small.

There was an item, too, of pleasant news. Chief Trader MacDonald had been moved. He was not promoted, but he had left Athabasca House and was placed over Fort Winnipegosis.

There was some more gossip of Fort Mackenzie and then the Chief congratulated him upon the change in Fraser.

"You've put new life into the old boy. Chatake Melbourne crushed it all out; but it's a long lane that has no turning and old Marcus has come to the curve, thanks to your kindness. Do you think you could manage alone for one winter? If so, I would like to send him to take charge of Fort Harray. Peterson has gone back to the prairies. Fraser would not accept until he had seen you, but I felt sure you would be glad. We'll get you assistance later." Charles dropped the letter, dismayed. He had not realised till now how much Fraser's companionship meant. But he showed nothing but pleasure.

"Why, Marcus, Fort Harray! You'll be over Norway House some day when Old Murder and all his generation are shooting each other full of holes down in the Unhappy Hunting Grounds!"

But they were both rather silent over their supper that evening. Even Fraser's joy was tempered by the thought of parting.

"Now, tell me all the news," Charles cried, after supper was over, making a gallant attempt to throw off his depression. The raw Autumn day had closed early in a driving rain, and Father Abraham had built a cheery fire. "Tell me everything you said and did since you left," he added, throwing another log on the fire and pulling up his chair.

"Just what I'm waiting for. I'm like a youngster

home from its first visit to the pantomime. I want to tell all about the clowns and the funny animals. The most important thing was a wedding. The bride came all the way from Red River, and Jimmie Percival said you were the chief criminal in the affair and should have been best man."

"It wasn't Madame Commodore?" shouted Charles.

"Madame Commodore Hawkins it was, all the way from Georgetown. Come at your bidding to marry Taylor." Fraser went off into his soft chuckling laugh. "When old Tom saw her step out of the boat he went into a panic and it took all the men on the place to keep him from fleeing back to his Arctic den behind the Ram-parts. The lady herself had the repose that marks the Vere de Vere. She had brought her daughter along, a bouncing soncie lass, who had evidently come to be married too."

"Madame said she was for me," boasted Charles. "Why didn't I go?"

"You'd never have come back alive, so I've done you one good turn. But, my word, it was a wedding! Jimmie Percival organised everything, even to the triumphal march down to the Mission. The men collected every metal article in the fort and banged a fandango all the way there and back, and when they were married we held an all-night celebration. Miss Hawkins was the belle. She danced most enthusiastically, and McPherson complimented her on her grace and beauty. You know how the Bourgeois can do the gallant. He suggested that any young officer of Mackenzie District might be proud to have her, and that set the new bride out to acquire a son-in-law."

"Salome danced and Herodias put her up to acquiring the head and hand of the Chief Bachelor of the place. Oh, why wasn't I there!"

"You'd never have escaped if you had. Miss Eily started at the top and went all the way down the line, and like the men in the parable who were bidden to a

wedding they all with one consent began to make excuses. Old Tom went around encouraging the shy ones. He took on the duties of papa right at once, but even his influence was of no use. But the wedding was a great success, even though it wasn't a double one. They departed looking very happy, Old Tom as proud as a peacock over his white wife. And they said that the girl was married to the postmaster at Fort Cabot the day they arrived."

The lady had evidently not forgotten Charles for she sent her love and a present of some St. Paul taffy she had brought all the way, expecting to meet him at Fort Mackenzie. She could never have ventured on the long journey, he declared, had she not thought that one of her dear Fort Garry boys was at the other end. "There is no doubt the daughter was for you," Fraser declared, "and so you have your reward for letting me go. You ought to get some pay for staying here all summer. And now you've given me my promotion too."

He looked at his friend, his eyes filled with the inarticulate love that men hold for each other, and for the first time in his long weary year at Fort Hearne Charles felt that he could not regret having been banished.

They sat far into the night. Outside, the rain drove against the windows and the waves thundered on the rocky shore, but the fire crackled on the hearth and the bare shadowy room was warm and comfortable. For the first time Fraser spoke of his past.

"I started wrong by running foul of the Family Compact," he said. "When I arrived in this country I was placed at Norway House and you know what that means."

"Not under Cameron?" asked Charles sympathetically.

"Yes, Old Murder, himself. He's quite the devil, you know," Fraser said quietly. "He hit me once. It was in my best boxing days and so, I—I knocked him down," he added diffidently.

"Bully for you!" exploded Charles.

"No," Fraser smiled, "it wasn't. The bully sent me to Botany Bay. I was up here a year when I got a letter

from my fiancée. She had married. The man was rich, of course. I couldn't go home; so I did my best to go to the devil. I might not have succeeded so thoroughly if it hadn't been for—did you ever by any chance meet Chatake Melbourne who used to be here?"

Charles reached hastily for a fresh knot of wood and flung it noisily upon the fire. "Yes,—I did," he answered with his back turned.

"Well, keep your eyes open if you happen to have that misfortune again." Fraser had dropped into a slow drawl. "The Pelican belongs to that class of animals who rise on stepping stones of their dead friends to higher things."

Charles felt the skin of his hands tingle as though a chill had passed over him.

"Melbourne and I came out together," Fraser went on. "We were schoolmates in Edinburgh. He was sent up here by Governor McTavish for trying to overreach himself at Fort Garry. But he has influential relatives in the service and they got him out of here as soon as McTavish's back was turned. I was slated twice to leave here and Melbourne misrepresented my work and got the promotion instead. All the time I thought he was my friend. When he finally got the promotion to Fort MacKenzie that was coming to me I just let things go, and so I married and settled down. Melbourne's got some sort of position as secretary at Lower Fort Garry, I believe, so the Pelican will never need to come back to the wilderness again."

There was a long silence. Charles dared not speak.

"Do you know that before you came here, Charlie, I'd just about let go everything; I thought I might as well. I didn't see any chance of promotion, and I couldn't resign and go home on account of the youngsters and their mother. I hope you don't mind my telling you that at first you were a most indefatigable thorn in my flesh. Living with you was like trying to sleep out in July with the mosquitoes coming as thick as a fog. One had to get

up and slap. And after a while I got used to walking around."

In spite of his own troubles Charles's heart was in a warm glow. "Pshaw," he exclaimed boyishly, "that's all nonsense!"

"No, it's not. I think I first got my feet onto something solid through hearing you sing that old paraphrase you're always at about 'courage in the evil hour.' I lost mine when everything went to smash, but I've got a grip on it again."

"Courage in the evil hour!" Charles rose and began to walk up and down the shadowy room. "And here I am, and I haven't any to face my own."

"You?" Fraser stared. The Young Chevalier had always been so gay and so carefree he had never guessed that he had experienced any greater trouble than his quarrel with Chief Factor MacNeill.

"If it's got anything to do with my leaving . . ." he ventured.

"No, no. It's not that. Besides, you must go. No, it's the same trouble as your own—the Pelican."

It was out at last. Charles poured forth all the fear and worry of his long exile. Fraser listened in deepest sympathy. It was natural that he should have little faith in the constancy of the girl at Red River. He had very little encouragement to give, but his words were heartening.

"It may be a long way round for you, Charlie," he said, as he rose to go to his own house. "But even if it is, you will arrive—dogs flying, bells ringing, and all the flags out. You won't go down before the storm as I did. But don't be too sure of your ill luck. My skies cleared just when I had settled down to perpetual night. There may suddenly come a bright day for you and you will go flying out on the Grand Traverse." He paused, and added shyly, "Only be sure you're ready for it."

CHAPTER XXIV

A Jacobite Maiden

“**U**NCLE MALCOLM, please tell me something.” Flora Carmichael was standing at the window, peeping out between the silver ferns and palms that adorned the frosted pane. She was watching with troubled frowning eyes the guest who had just left. Young Chief Trader Melbourne of Lower Fort Garry, muffled in handsome furs, and driving a smart horse and cariole, swept around the house from the stable with a sharp jingle of bells. He glanced up eagerly at the window, and the girl drew back quickly. She turned to the warm fire-lit room.

“Please, tell me, did you ever taste pelican?”

Old Chief Factor Murray, seated comfortably before the snapping fire, glanced up at her suspiciously. His frosty eyebrows came together.

“No, I never did. Why, pray?”

“Oh! I just asked from idle curiosity. Those who have tried it say it makes a most unpalatable dish.”

She perched herself on the arm of his chair, and looked down at him with wide blue eyes, devoid of anything but artless questioning. But the old man was not deceived by her innocence; he grunted disapprovingly.

“And who has been giving you this intensely interesting information?”

“Archie Sinclair. He said he tasted pelican last Spring out at Touchwood Hills. The servants lost their nets in the ice and there was nothing to eat, when he shot one. He says there is something peculiar about the taste, that makes one dislike any kind of food for days after.”

She swung a dainty foot, and continued to look down at him, a quiet, steady gaze, full of polite enquiry. The

Chief Factor stirred uneasily. "I suppose this is some sort of confounded parable," he grumbled.

Mrs. Murray looked up from her embroidery apprehensively. "Flora, dear," she whispered warningly, while Adelaide Simpson, seated in the chimney-corner, with primly-folded hands, gazed in placid wonder.

"If it is one of your impertinent inventions, my lady," continued the old man, ignoring his wife, "let me add a few words to it. It is only those whose stomachs are too full who turn up their noses at good food."

The girl considered this for a few minutes with deep gravity, her golden head on one side, her eyes on the fire.

"No, Archie said they were desperately hungry, but they preferred to starve rather than taste it again."

The old man tried to glare at her; but the firelight played on her sunny hair and her blue eyes were beginning to dance. He knew if he dared look at her long she would compel him to smile and she would score another victory in the long continued warfare over "Chatake" Melbourne.

He rose abruptly. "A period of starvation is an excellent cure for the over-fastidious. We may be forced to try it," he said harshly, and tramped from the room.

"Flora, Flora," faltered the elder lady tearfully. "Why do you persist in arguing with him? It is of no use. You will have to yield in the end."

The girl dropped on the fur rug at Mrs. Murray's feet. The laughing eyes were shadowed. In spite of her gallant bearing she was beginning to be afraid. It was true; every one yielded to her uncle sooner or later.

"Oh, Adelaide! I wish I were like you and could take any food that my relatives dished up, without questioning."

Adelaide smiled vaguely. She was seldom quite sure what her cousin meant, but she was full of sympathy. Her broad, contented face had been growing more placid and kindly with each passing month. She was finishing her last winter at school, and was to be married the next summer when her father came down to Norway House for

her. Adelaide had never seen the man who had been picked out as her future husband, but she did not trouble her sleek black head about the matter. Her father and grandfather would see that he was an officer of the Company, and that was sufficient.

"Indeed, darling, I wish you could see your way to obeying your Uncle," said Mrs. Murray plaintively, stroking Flora's sunny curls. "I really can't see why you should object to Mr. Melbourne," she added, sighing heavily. Flora glanced up at Adelaide, and Adelaide's big black eyes dropped to her folded hands. She was the only one who shared her secret.

"He is such a charming young man," Mrs. Murray was continuing. "He has such good connections, too, and is really a distant relative."

"Just the proper distance," Flora interposed.

"But you will have to do what Grandpapa says," Adelaide whispered, when Flora had taken her up to her bare chilly bedroom for her wraps. "M'sieu Chevalier, he is so far away."

"He will come back," Flora said, bravely, "and until he does," she added determinedly, "I wouldn't marry Prince Rupert, himself, were he alive to-day, and asked me."

Adelaide stared from out her enveloping fur hood in wondering admiration.

"But Grandpapa!" She whispered the awesome word fearfully. "He will make you!"

Flora's head came up, her slim shoulders straightened.

"He wouldn't dare! I'd do what Marie Rose did!"

Adelaide shook her head despairingly, and the two girls went down the stairs slowly, their arms around each other.

"You will never, never tell, Adelaide," Flora whispered, as she always did at parting; and Adelaide answered as usual, "Never, never, Flora."

Long after his rebellious young relative had gone to bed, old Chief Factor Murray sat beside his desk, staring into the glowing stove. For the first time in his life he

was balked in his plans, and that by a foolish young slip of a girl who did not know her own mind.

Walter Melbourne, he was assured, was the very man for Flora, and there was no doubt that the young man was entirely of the same opinion. Melbourne's half-breed mother was related to the Chief Factor's first wife. The young man was handsome and clever, had been made a Chief Trader at the last meeting of the Council and was on the high road to further promotion. Then he was a nephew of Chief Factor MacNeill, who, in the absence of the Governor of Assiniboia District, had risen to a place of great power among the wintering partners, and even threatened Cameron and the old Family Compact. And that was not all; the young man was closely related to the great Sir James Melbourne, whose voice was a dominating note in the doings of the great Council in London. It was due to his influence that, though Governor McTavish had returned to Fort Garry, Melbourne was placed at the Lower Fort, right next door, as it were, to his enemy, and MacNeill had charge of another very important post. Old Chief Factor Murray's heart swelled as he viewed the prospect before him. The young men had begun to ignore him; now he saw himself restored to his old position of power. With Flora married to Walter he might become the dictator of Rupert's Land. He would found a new reigning House on the ruins of the old Family Compact. He would cause McTavish to wear his Governor's crown uneasily. Yes, he would even reach out and make those tyrants who sat in the seats of the mighty in London tremble in their comfortable chairs! And now all these high ambitions were in danger of being frustrated by the whim of a foolish girl.

Flora had made it very plain to all, from the day she had ridden along the King's Highway and caught the admiring glance of the handsome newcomer riding up to Fort Garry, that she would have none of Chatake Melbourne. For some mysterious reason she had taken a violent dislike to Chief Factor MacNeill at Fort Garry,

and extended it to every one related to him. Her uncle was astounded at her outrageous independence. He had known only the women of his own household, and, so far, to them his wish had been law. His white wife had been quite as subservient as his Assiniboine princess. Flora was something new and incomprehensible in womankind.

He had not the smallest suspicion that her unreasonable stubbornness had anything to do with a certain young apprentice clerk, who used to ride up and down the banks of the Red River, and had suddenly disappeared. His strongest toddy, brewed of an evening when old fellow-officers sat around the fire, could not have produced the absurd notion that his going had meant anything to the niece of retired Chief Factor Murray.

But it was characteristic of Flora that the injustice done to Charles was the one thing needed to place her, with all the warmth of her strong nature, entirely on his side. She was naturally frank and outspoken, and had there been anything she could confess about the Young Chevalier she would have gone straight to her uncle and told him she was going to marry him. Yes, and would have adhered to it, too, should the Red River overflow its banks in consequence and carry them all down to Lake Winnipeg. But the humiliating part was that there was nothing to confess. She shrewdly guessed that the exile would scarcely ask the niece of Chief Factor Murray to marry him, even though his letters left her in no doubt as to his feelings. And sometimes her courage almost failed her as she looked at the long years ahead.

As for Walter Melbourne, he did not despair. Miss Carmichael had repulsed him gently, but unmistakably; but he always got what he wanted sooner or later, he reminded himself, and he would be successful here, if he waited. But he was not idly waiting. He set himself cautiously to discover what was the reason for the girl's indifference, for he noticed that no other man was any more successful than himself. It was not natural that any one so attractive should be so cold and distant to all.

At first he suspected young Sinclair, the junior clerk at the Upper Fort. He was the one young man in the Red River settlement upon whom Miss Carmichael smiled. And at church or social affairs they were always conferring eagerly. So Melbourne set himself to cultivate the unsuspecting Archie. He invited him to the Lower Fort, and loaned him his dogs and his horses. He paid marked attention to Adelaide Simpson, too, whenever she came down to the Lower Fort on a visit to the Ross girls. Adelaide had all the caution of her Indian ancestry, and he learned nothing from her. But, at last, he found the clue through young Sinclair. Archie loved to talk about his friend and rail against MacNeill for his banishment, especially as Melbourne was related to the tyrant. Indeed, they all talked about the Young Chevalier at the Upper Fort! his gaiety, his passion for work, his unfailing generosity. From Dr. Gordon to old Geordie, every one had a word of love and admiration for the banished Prince Charlie.

From Ferguson he heard the story of Marie Rose Cameron, and how she had fled to the forest for love of him. Every one wondered why the idiot had not married the girl and been promoted, instead of taking to the North Pole, so Ferguson declared.

And then Flora herself confirmed his suspicions. It was at a dinner party given by Harry Erskine's parents. Harry had sung some Scottish ballads, while Flora accompanied him on the piano. When he finished with "Will ye no come back again?" some one recalled young Charles Stuart, the apprentice clerk, who used to be at Fort Garry. Where was he now? Melbourne, watching Miss Carmichael, saw the flush rise to her cheek and the tears to her eyes as she slipped quickly from the piano stool and took refuge beside her aunt. He was almost certain now; subsequent revelations made the certainty absolute; and, with the quiet thoroughness that characterised all his work, Melbourne set to work to render his rival innocuous.

It was a late autumn day and Flora had just finished the letter that was to go with the winter packet down to Norway House, and thence on its long journey to the north. That letter had taken all summer to write, and now that the pleasant task was done, she was sitting by the window, looking out over the prairie, feeling a little pensive and lonely. She had written, destroyed, and re-written scores of pages. Here she had said too much, and a page had to be recopied. This last paragraph was altogether too cold to send to one who had been banished to the North Pole. Why, one would not speak to a banished dog in such terms. The whole page had to be re-written, only to be destroyed at its turn, and made over, just a little cooler.

Her uncle was down at the Lower Fort, her aunt was in bed with one of her usual headaches. She was all alone. She sat looking out over the golden prairie, mentally following her letter on its long, long journey; down to Norway House, up the Saskatchewan, following the chain of lakes and rivers that led to Portage la Loche; across the long portage. . . . There arose the muffled pad of hoofs on the soft driveway, and Adelaide rode past the window. Flemmand ran out to help her alight, Flora dancing after him full of joy. Adelaide received her rapturous welcome gravely. She glanced around the room. "Come and walk down to the river," she whispered. "I have something to tell."

"How lovely! A walk with you, and a whole prairieful of gossip! I've been a prisoner all day. Aunt Murray has gone to sleep, and Frances will watch."

Flemmand led the horse to the stable. Flora ran for her bonnet and shawl, and the two girls turned their steps towards the coulee. It was one of those perfect prairie autumn days, a flawless blue sky, a flawless golden earth, and that wonderful combination of warm sunlight and cool air, clear and thrilling, that is found only on the great western plains. Faraway objects seemed within arm's length in the crystal air, the river shone like a

stream of silver, the wide-sailed windmills of the settlement flapped their wings like giant birds, the wind whipped the young ladies' skirts and frolicked with their shawls.

Flora danced ahead, Adelaide following more sedately. There was something greatly troubling the half-breed girl, and her feet were as heavy as her kind heart. They stepped down into the yellowing poplar grove and took refuge from the wind. Flora chose the nook; it was the place where Flora MacDonald and the Prince had first met.

"I finished my letter to-day, Adelaide, and I should like to compel Chief Factor MacNeill to run all the way to Mackenzie District with it," she added with more gaiety than vindictiveness. "Now, what is your news, Adelaide mine? You look as if the H.B.C. was about to be abolished."

The other girl did not respond to her gay mood, and was silent so long that Flora turned toward her. "What is it, dear?" she asked suddenly anxious. "Have you had bad news from home?"

So Adelaide, halting and stammering, her kind eyes on the yellow grass at her feet, began the story she had heard of the Young Chevalier's faithlessness. In her agitation she lost the perfect English accent in which she was being carefully drilled at school.

"De Hawkins woman, from de St. Paul boat," she began, "she go down de Mackenzie las' summer. M'sieu Chevalier, he write for her, and she go."

Flora nodded, still wondering. She knew all about the fun Charles and the other young fellows at Fort Mackenzie had had over that nonsensical letter that had taken Madame Commodore to the northland in search of an officer-husband.

"She take some one wit' her—a girl." Adelaide was growing more distressed every moment.

"Joe La Plante, he go down to Portage la Loche wit' de brigade, an' he tell Anna Ross, he see her go down

dere." She faltered, her kind, brown eyes raised apologetically. "Joe La Plante, he tell about her," she whispered.

"Tell what?" Flora, leaning against the trunk of a singing elm, turned bewildered blue eyes upon the half-breed girl. "What are you trying to tell me, Adelaide, dear?"

"About Marie Rose Cameron. Joe La Plante, he see her go down, wit' de Portage la Loche boat. De Hawkins woman, she take her down de Mackenzie. She go for marry M'sieu Chevalier, and dey not tell nobody."

Flora stood motionless so long that Adelaide glanced up anxiously. Her cousin was standing erect, her cheeks crimson, her eyes blazing.

"It's a wicked slander! Who dared to tell you such a falsehood?" Adelaide cringed. Flora, standing there like an insulted queen, had something of the terrifying appearance of her grandfather.

"Anna Ross, she say it," she faltered.

"And who told her? A drunken half-breed boatman! How could you listen to such a story, Adelaide? You may be sure Archie Sinclair would not let any one say it. It's a wicked fabrication! Whoever started this shall pay for it! How could you believe it for a moment? It's supremely ridiculous!"

But there was something in Flora's repeated denials that savoured of panic. Adelaide put her arm around her protectingly.

"Oh, Flora, please forgive me! I—I oughtn't—dey say I ought to tell you, an' I not know what to do, me."

Flora returned the caress absently. "I am not angry with you, but I shall find out who started this wicked story." She turned swiftly. "I shall send Flemmand this very minute up to the fort and ask Archie Sinclair to come down." She set off at such a pace against the wind that Adelaide had some gasping ado to keep up with her. She spoke only once, whirling upon her companion with a question.

"Does Mr. Melbourne know anything about this?"

"No, I don't think so. He been away at Norway House all mont'," Adelaide answered, and the suspicion died at its birth.

Flemmand mounted his young mistress' horse in hot haste, and rode away up to Fort Garry as though a band of Plain Crees were at his heels. He came racing back within an incredibly short time with the dire news that M'sieu Seenclair had left that morning with the carts for a far-off post on the prairie. He had left a brief, hurried note of farewell, which Flemmand duly delivered.

Flora, who had been pacing the room during most of his absence, sank into a chair. She seemed suddenly to lose all her energy and defiance. She was pale and her eyes were anguished.

"Tell me all about it, Adelaide," she begged humbly. "I'm sorry. I was so cross."

Thus encouraged, Adelaide told the whole story, just as Anna Ross had given it to her. It appeared that M'sieu Stuart had wanted to marry Marie Rose when he was at Norway House, but her father had refused. One of the clerks had heard them quarrelling over it through the door of the office. Then Chief Factor Cameron had sent Marie Rose west with the Saskatchewan Brigade, and she had run away to escape marrying Chief Trader McRae. So when Charles had heard of it he sent for Madame Hawkins to come north, and bring Marie Rose with her. The woman was rewarded by being married to an officer of the Company in Mackenzie District.

For the next few days Flora went about the old house as usual, attending to her light household tasks, ordering the meals, warming her uncle's slippers at the stove damper, or taking her aunt's tray to her bedroom when she was not able to be up for breakfast. But she did everything mechanically. She neither saw, nor heard, what was going on about her. Her whole being was taken up in one fierce desire to know the truth. Only to be

sure! And there was no one whom she could ask, no one to whom she could turn.

The winter packet was almost ready to leave and she had not yet sent in her letter to the fort. To trust him in spite of all rumours, or to wait till she was sure—that was the burning question. Sitting alone by the fire one dull, blustery afternoon, when the prairie wind howled around the house as only a prairie wind can howl, she finally made up her mind to risk all on his integrity. She would trust him until he was proven false. When Flora Carmichael made a decision she acted upon it immediately; she was running upstairs to get her letter and despatch Frances with it, when round the house, there clattered a horseman, and the next moment Flemmand was ushering Mr. Melbourne into the room.

It was his first visit since he had been away at Norway House and he had much pleasant gossip to bring the ladies of the world beyond the Red River hamlet. Mrs. Murray forgot her headache and came down stairs and graciously served tea, very glad to see him again.

"I met one of my old friends from the Mackenzie, at Norway House," he chatted agreeably, "Ogilvie, who was up at Fort Radisson; he came down with the Athabasca men. He's been offered an excellent position in the Smithsonian Institute and is going to leave the service." Flora's heart leaped. Charles had told her about Ogilvie and his birds and his wonderful knowledge of natural history. He would know! Perhaps Mr. Melbourne knew too!

"I am so glad he has come out from those trying Polar regions," Mrs. Murray declared. "Though I do not really see how the winter could be any colder in the Mackenzie River District than in Kildonan. Arthur Ogilvie is too clever to waste his talents there. The Ogilvies were all a very distinguished family, Mr. Melbourne, it seemed too bad that he should have to live among the Esquimaux and icebergs. His uncle, Cuthbert Ogilvie, M.A., wrote a history or something or other. I can't remember what it was. But they were a literary family. Sir Donald Ogilvie, his

cousin . . ." the old lady travelled on leisurely into an exhaustive history of the Ogilvie family, to which Walter Melbourne listened with absorbed interest, while Flora fidgeted with her cup and waited breathlessly for more news of the Mackenzie River.

"I should think Mr. Ogilvie would be glad to get back to civilisation," she ventured at last when the history was finished.

Melbourne smiled and shrugged. "Fort Radisson is nearly as bad as Fort Hearne, and Fort Hearne is the worst place in Rupert's Land. By the way," he added musingly, "isn't that where Archie Sinclair's chum was sent? What is his name, now,—er, Stuart?"

He did not look at Flora, and she could not trust her voice to answer just yet; but Mrs. Murray remarked that Apprentice Clerk Stuart had been sent away somewhere, but she had quite forgotten the name of the place. He always used to be at church with Apprentice Clerk Sinclair. Such a fine pair of young men they were. Mr. Stuart had been well brought up. She had known his mother before her marriage. She was a daughter of the great Doctor Bell of St. Enoch's. . . .

Flora listened to this chapter of family history with more interest, but still with great impatience, and was grateful when Mr. Melbourne took up the important subject again.

"Oh, Fort Hearne isn't such a bad place after all provided one has company. I nearly died of loneliness, but of course Mr. Stuart's case is quite different." He paused maddeningly, and Flora's heart stood still. Would he never go on? She called all her courage to her aid and spoke.

"You mean there are other officers there now?" she asked calmly.

Melbourne was insupportably deliberate. "No, I really don't know who is there at present. There was a fellow named Fraser there when I went in, but he was worse than nobody as far as companionship went. But Mr.

Stuart doesn't need the company of fellow-officers now, according to Ogilvie. I suppose you heard all about his pretty romance that culminated at Fort Mackenzie?"

Mercifully he turned to Mrs. Murray and Flora sat rigid.

"I don't recall hearing anything of it," Mrs. Murray said, always eager for any news that might break the monotony of her days. "Do tell us about it."

"It's really worth telling," Melbourne said pleasantly. "Ogilvie grew quite sentimental over it. It appeared that there had been something between this young man and Miss Cameron, of Norway House. They came out from home together and had a thrilling adventure on the ice in the Bay. Papa absolutely forbade a marriage and sent the young man north, and the young lady followed him and they were married at Fort Mackenzie. Ogilvie saw her at Portage la Roche on his way down and he was charmed with her splendid daring." He laughed softly. "Rather good I call it."

Flora was sitting erect now, her head held up proudly. She was the kind to stand up under a blow rather than to cringe. "Thoroughbred," Melbourne was saying to himself, watching with a mingling of admiration and jealousy the gallant way in which she took the revelation.

She turned squarely to the visitor. Her face was pale and her eyes were brilliant, but she was perfectly poised.

"It is very interesting, indeed," she said quietly.

Melbourne leisurely took her cup to the table. He was careful not to show too much interest. "Yes, quite romantic," he remarked indifferently. "But we had its equal at Norway House when I was there. A daughter of old L'Esperance, the guide, came down from Athabasca House last summer . . ."

He chatted on genially, though he could see that Flora was not listening. But that did not matter, and he left very well satisfied with his day's work. It would be a year before the truth would come out, if it ever did, and in the meantime he would not be idle.

CHAPTER XXV

The Long Way 'Round

THE iron bands of winter tightened around the little fort on Great Slave Lake. The Indians went off to their hunting; all life disappeared. Occasionally a moose crossed the bay or a few timber wolves slunk out into the white desert of the lake and dodged back again into the forest, and the cry of a fox or wild cat came out of the chill waste. Every night the snow piled in great heaps about the Fort, and every morning the women cleared it away, carrying it out of the enclosure in skins; and the snow walls grew until the little lone colony seemed to be living at the bottom of a deep pit.

Charles set desperately to work to fill up his long evenings. With miserly care he hoarded the package of daily papers his mother had sent him. Every evening he took out one at his lonely supper. It was exactly a year old, but he read the news as though the print were just damp from the press.

Then every night he read a portion of his mother's and sisters' last letters, like a devout Christian reading his Bible. The pink note he had long ago learned by heart, but he read it often nevertheless, just for the joy of looking at it, and he kept his courage up on many an interminable night by repeating the most encouraging passages, that seemed to give an assurance that he had nothing to fear from the spectre of Melbourne.

But though the winter had started in deathly cold with a fury of storms, it did not really commence for Charles until after the wearied-for winter packet arrived.

He set off joyfully for it with Jasper and Doggie, on a clear afternoon, and made the Grand Traverse, coming

back by the long shore route. Then the winter came down in earnest upon the soul of the young exile. There was no pink note this time! Indeed, there was no Fort Garry letter. Archie had been sent to the Swan River District, and had no news of Brignal Banks, except that he had met Halliday, and Halliday's wife had assured him that Miss Carmichael was to marry Melbourne.

And so that was the end of it all, he told himself, as he settled down to face the interminable winter. For the first time he felt the bitterness of his punishment, its flagrant injustice. As one long night succeeded another he had a vision of himself growing old and bent, and finally content to sit and smoke by the fire, ambition and youth gone.

One day, looking over the fort diary to see if the amount of wood brought in equalled that of other years, he was interested to find some entries made by a man who signed himself Charles Stuart. And he further discovered that he had left a memento of himself.

All the windows in the fort were made of parchment except the one in the main building beside the desk. The lower half of it was fitted with glass, except one pane. Charles had always been glad of the extra light and the view of the lake, before the frost placed a thick, furry coating over it. He had vaguely supposed that the one pane had been broken and had been replaced by parchment. But he discovered that there was a melancholy interest attached to it, and that into this window was written the history of another lonely exile, just as a stained window in a cathedral told the story of some great martyr.

Away back in the early days of the fort, perhaps in Mackenzie's day, this other Charles Stuart had written a requisition for two panes of glass. The next year he had asked for two more. Charles looked up the diary and the arrival of the precious glass was noted. "Louis and I fitted the two new panes of glass this morning," read the entry.

The next year and the next the panes arrived. The

young man, with laborious patience, was building a window for himself. Then came an entry, "No glass for window received this year." Evidently some wealthy Nabob of the Hudson's Bay Company, living in London, had enquired why this insatiable young apprentice clerk should require so much glass, and it had been refused. And then the writing in the diary changed and there were no more ambitious requests for windowpanes.

Charles remembered that a Stuart was buried in the graveyard of the mission at Fort Mackenzie. He recalled the wooden slab, with the lettering almost obliterated. He questioned Father Abraham. Yes, the old man was a boy when the window was made, and he remembered the other Stuart.

"He sad all de tam," Abraham explained, his wrinkled, brown face expressive of a lively sympathy. "No, he not seek, he just die."

So this First Stuart had not succeeded in escaping his prison, nor even in finishing an opening to see out of it. And the brigade had paddled his body down to Fort Mackenzie with the furs, and that was all—"He just die."

From his bed in the room beyond, Charles could see the pale rectangle of the window, and many a night he lay listening to the artillery of the frost and watching the lights of the Aurora colour the squares of glass through their heavy frosting. Those window panes haunted him. He felt an impotent rage against the oppressor who had stopped that patient task, and yet he hated the window and wanted to leap from his bed and put his fist through it.

There came suddenly such a continuous fury of storms that for days no one dared venture beyond the stockade. Dense, driving snow whirled about the little island, threatening to bury them alive. At night the wind howled around the fort, shaking the place to its very foundations, searching out the cracks and sifting in the snow. It caught Charles's breath and paralysed his lungs as he dashed over to the stores in the morning.

When his brief day's work was done he made desperate efforts to keep at bay the oppressive loneliness that was stealing nearer his heart every dreary hour. He papered his room afresh with pictures of the doings of royal folk in pearls and high hats and crinolines, turning everything on the premises upside down in a fury of work, and nearly driving old Father Abraham and his squaw to take refuge in the forest. He read until he was almost blinded; played the squeaky old fiddle belonging to Jasper until his arm ached; talked with Jasper and Doggie over the fire until they nodded with sleep; and still the long Arctic nights dragged on and there were weary hours when he lay in bed, staring out of poor Stuart's window.

One night, after a week of confinement, he sat alone in the dingy old room. All the rest of the fort was asleep, but he dared not go to his sleepless bed. His eyes ached so he could not read by the firelight, and the smoky, fish-oil lamp had gone out, amid hideous smells. He threw another log upon the fire, and, scraping the frost from the window-pane, looked out. The fury of the storm had died away. The world lay spent and white, a fearsome, lonely waste, with the lights of the Aurora shooting and whirling above it. The ghostly emptiness of it dismayed him. He flung open the door for a moment, in mad defiance of the menacing Something that seemed to rush out of the void to destroy him. Then he stood awed before the shifting, whirling, rustling wonder of colour, now green and silver, now blue and rose. The cold stung him, the air was like needles, his eyes filled with mist. His heavy Hudson's Bay clothing felt as thin as paper, and he backed quickly into the warm room. He slammed the door and walked up and down the dark, smoky old hall like a caged animal. His evil hour had come upon him, the battle with depression was on. As he marched he recited aloud poems he had learned at school—"Sir Patrick Spens," "How Horatio Kept the Bridge," "Stone Walls Do Not a Prison Make." Finally he took down the old fiddle again and

began to play. He ran over a few old Scottish songs, but, without volition, the bow slipped across the notes of "Brigial Banks."

It brought such a flood of memories that he stopped suddenly, afraid. He could smell the fresh, sweet breath of the prairie. He could see the coulee twisting down to the Red River under a flawless blue sky and hear again the White Throat's song and that other singer, sweeter than any bird, trilling:

"O, Brigial Banks are wild and fair,
And Greta Woods are green,
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English Queen!"

He drew his bow harshly across the strings and burst into the Red River Jig, that wistful, delightful air that always sets the feet dancing and the heart aching. When he had played it many times he stood and gazed into the fire, the instrument held to his chin, the bow suspended. Now he understood the mystery of that alluring lilt. It was born of a gallant attempt to dance away the desperate loneliness of some outpost; a challenge to the paralysing depression that reached out from the lone, barren lakes and the dark forest to clutch the heart, as the frost clutches the body.

He put down the fiddle and began to dance the steps as he remembered them. Then he took down a pair of single-sticks from above the fireplace, crossed them on the floor, and tried the sword dance. It was a very gallant performance, a splendid defiance thrown out to the black demon of depression that was settling upon his brave spirit.

Next he swept aside the swords and leaped into the wild hilarity of the Highland Fling. He danced it madly; he twirled and leaped; he snapped his fingers and shouted "Souisa" to an imaginary piper, redoubling his speed to keep up with an imaginary tune.

The roaring flames in the chimney kept pace with the wild, dancing figure, and on the frosted pane and the smoky walls a grotesque shadow leaped and whirled opposite him. And outside, in the white, cold glitter of the world, the Aurora danced its dance of death in flashing mockery.

Except for the dancer, the fort lay in profound slumber. Even the dogs were quiet for once. For since the cold had become so severe Charles had given orders that they be housed at night, as poor MacNeill had lost his depressed and sullen tail the first night of the intense frost. So there was no one to announce that two figures on snowshoes were gliding out of the grey expanse of the forest and creeping up to the building.

The two figures paused before the one lighted window where the wild shadow leaped and whirled. They stood and peered through the frosted pane. The dancer gave another shout to the piper and redoubled his speed. The watchers turned and silently slipped away.

Young Thunder and his comrade on the trail of a moose, within a few miles of the fort the day before, had decided to run over and see how Waby-stig-wan did, and get a good meal of hung fish and spend the night in the warmth of the Indian Hall. But the sight and sound that met them changed all their plans. Young Thunder had often seen the Red River Jig danced by his fellow-boatmen, but the Highland Fling was an unplumbed mystery. Its mad, whirling, leaping intricacies could mean only one thing to his simple mind. He had seen men of his own tribe go like that when the Evil One possessed them. Big Knife had danced just so one night and then had gone off into the forest alone and turned cannibal, and terrible things had happened. And now the Evil One had cast his eye upon Waby-stig-wan, and he, too, had gone raving mad. It was bad medicine!

The two young hunters had all the Indian's superstitious fear of a madman. They did not linger a moment to warn the fort of their danger, even though they were

convinced that he might murder them all in their beds. They fled straight back to the forest, saying nothing, as was the Indian way. But long before dawn there sped out from the camp two men with a dog team—Young Thunder and Lightning running along the trail to Fort Mackenzie, to acquaint the Big Master with the disturbing news and beg him to come to the rescue.

CHAPTER XXVI

The Message of the Aurora

THE week's storm was over, and the next day Charles and Jasper ran out with the dog team to the camp, where the men resumed their wood-cutting. Before they returned, the short Arctic day had disappeared. The sun had set, leaving a sky of palest green crystal, deepening to a starry blue above. They left the forest trail and came out upon the white desert expanse of the lake. Suddenly, from behind the blue-grey wall of forest there leaped and danced airy figures, ghostly pale at first, but anon growing bolder and flashing bright in silver armour. As though obeying some invisible commander, they rushed to their task, and while Charles halted his team at Jasper's importunities, to remove the dog-bells, he glanced up in wonder, to find that they had hung the sky with rustling silken curtains of rainbow gossamer that swished and swirled and gleamed around his head.

The ethereal hangings swung softly, changing with every movement; now tender blue and palest rose, now delicate green and mauve. They paused, quivered, and there shot through them, flung up from the purple line of the forest, spears of violent light. Then the dancing heavenly hosts suddenly swept away all the splendour of their labour, and flung over the heavens a new garment, rose and green, blue and lavender, hung with flashing silver fringes. Swiftly the airy forces went to work upon it, fashioning a marvellous pattern, shifting the parts, weaving silver warp and rainbow woof, fold on fold, circling the sky in sweeping webs of colour till they had built up an airy tent, a miracle of beauty, from the soft horizon to the high central point of its gleaming crystal dome.

The lovely structure quivered as if in ecstasy, and a soft rose flush spread beneath it. For an instant it held—a breathless moment of expectancy, as though heaven and earth waited for the final word that would solve all their painful mystery. Then the marvellous fabric fell to pieces in shattering glory, and again, silver and green and blue, the dancing spirits leaped to its reconstruction.

Swift and willing they were, like the minions that reared the Palace of Music at Abt Vogler's command.

“Another and yet another, one crowd but with many a crest,

Raising my rampired walls of gold as transparent glass,
Eager to do and die, yield each his place to the rest,
For higher still, and higher
Up the pinnaced glory reached!”

Charles ran on beside his dogs, breathless with the awesome grandeur. His thoughts turned, as Abt Vogler's had, to the Builder and Maker of houses not made with hands. Resplendent passages from a Book in which he had been carefully instructed came crowding into his mind:

“Thou coverest thyself with light, as with a garment.”

“Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.”

“If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me.”

“*Even the night shall be light about me.*” The words were awesomely illustrated here in the splendour of the Arctic night, with the Aurora flaming and hissing around his head!

He was impressed strongly with the feeling that there was some mysterious struggle going on about him; a tremendous conflict between order and chaos. One moment law reigned, and the next a mad confusion had swept every sign of a pattern from the changing heavens.

"And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought Michael and his angels, and prevailed not."

The eternal struggle of the ages was surely being pictured here in flaming colours. He had a swift vision of the great forces of the universe lined up against chaos and confusion, injustice and pain, and his heart swelled with the wonder of it. These heavenly hosts were painting the struggle of earth, that everlasting effort to bring harmony out of strife and discord. To build the structure that the great Architect demanded, only to have it fall in shattering ruin, and to leap that same instant to its remaking—that was life!

He ran on, the crisp rustle of his dogs' feet answering the rustle of the curtained skies, ran in the awesome splendour of the whirling heavens and read their lesson. The struggle that was going on in his own lonely indignant heart was but a part of this. His mother had been right. It was not cold, nor hardship, nor loneliness that was to be dreaded, but failure to struggle on. Why, he was one in this mighty phalanx that leaped again and again to their ruined task. He fought side by side with Michael and his angels! And he had played the craven and wanted to quit the field!

To fight! To have courage in the evil hour! To do one's duty in the face of even gross injustice! That was the thing that mattered! Nothing in life could be commonplace then, not even feeding the fish to the howling, ravenous dogs at night, or seeing that the Indian women swept the snow from the yard. Life was a glorious battle, and must be fought gallantly, so read the message in the throbbing glory of the Arctic skies!

One day, about a fortnight later, Charles stepped down to the fort gate to see if the men were returning with their allotment of firewood, when, far away across the blinding glitter of the lake he descried a black dot, moving slowly out from the blue-grey point of land. A dog train! The approach of anything human to this lonely post was

enough to set the whole fort into a state of excitement. He hallooed for Jasper, and on his heels came Doggie and Abraham and all the women, children and dogs; the parchment doors banging like the crack of a pistol in the frosty air.

"Company outfit," Jasper pronounced excitedly, long before the approaching dog-sled had resolved itself into anything but a moving blur to Charles. At the word he sent Doggie to run up the flag and returned to the gate.

"White man," was Jasper's next announcement. He knew by the way the dogs ran that they were not the Indian "geddies," but belonged to the Company, and he further recognised the blood of the man in front by his walk. Charles stared eagerly, but the white glare of the snow blinded him. Then the bells began to jingle, the white man had got into the sleigh, his two attendants behind, and in a minute more the dogs were dashing up the slope, tongues hanging out.

The hood of the white man's capote was pulled down over his face, his beard and eyebrows were white and hanging with tiny icicles, and it was a few moments before Charles recognised young Percival, the clerk whom he had met at Fort Mackenzie. He went leaping down the bank, and fairly flung himself upon his visitor.

The young man drew back from the eager greeting, and Charles could not help feeling that his manner was less cordial than when they last met. For a few moments he had a suspicion that he had come with bad news. Perhaps something about his mother had come to Fort Mackenzie in the winter packet!

But the visitor put his mind at rest on that score. "The Bourgeois wanted to know how things were going on here," he explained, his manner constrained and nervous, "And here I am."

Charles led the way joyously up to the fort, shouting for Abraham to cook every delicacy on the place for dinner. "You're the only visitor I've ever had!" he cried, "so you'll have to eat a year's dinners. Old Father Abraham

isn't exactly a specialist in fancy dishes, but he can make bully rouchou, and Sarah shall cook us some bannocks. Hurrah!"

They drank the guest's health, and while dinner was being prepared Charles showed him around. Percival exclaimed in admiration at the perfect order of everything, but all the time kept turning an enquiring eye on his host, Charles speculating all the while on the meaning of his strange conduct.

They had a tremendous dinner with Sarah's best bannocks as dessert, and afterwards they smoked their pipes over the blazing fire. Suddenly, in the midst of their talk, Jimmie Percival, with a gesture that reminded Charles of Johnny McBain, hit the table with his fist and burst out:

"Hang it all, Stuart, I'm on a fool's errand! You're as sane as I am."

Charles looked at him uncomprehending. "Well, what if I am?" he cried gaily, "that may not be a very high compliment to my intelligence. What's the point?"

"That fool Indian of yours, Young Thunder, is the one that's crazy. He came down to Fort Mackenzie with a wild yarn about you. He and that running mate of his, who came with you from Athabasca House, came storming in about three weeks ago with news that Waby-stigwan up at Fort Hearne had gone raving mad, and was fairly kicking the institution to smithereens. He told the Bourgeois that you were howling and yelling and leaping round this place one night, and we thought you'd gone loony, and the Chief sent me to tie you up and take charge."

For a moment Charles stared stupefied. Neither Thunder nor Lightning was of the highly imaginative type, and there seemed no reason for their maligning their old friend thus.

Suddenly the unexplained tracks they had seen outside the fort windows on the morning after the storm flashed into his memory. Old Father Abraham with his uncanny Indian perception had declared they were made by the

racquets of the two young men from the Lake of the Marshes, and Waby-stig-wan had laughed at him for an old romancer.

Charles burst into a shout of laughter. "The Highland Fling! Poor old Thunder and Lightning! They thought I was a raving Dervish. And no wonder, not being Scotch!"

When he was able to explain Percival joined in the laughter till they fairly blew the smoke in rings about the dingy room.

The visitor stayed one short, joyous week, and then returned to headquarters with the good news. But Young Thunder had unwittingly done his friend a much greater good turn than even his kindly heart had planned. Up at Fort Mackenzie, Chief Factor McPherson listened to the explanation of young Stuart's madness, and a sympathetic look crept into his kind eyes. "I'll get him out of there next winter," he confided to his pipe that evening.

CHAPTER XXVII

The Grand Traverse

ALL along the Red River and up the Assiniboine there could be heard the first mutterings of the storm that was soon to rage around the little Settlement and threaten the peace and security of all Rupert's Land.

The French Metis were restless and discontented. Murmurs of secession whirled to and fro on every wind that swept the white prairie. Men refought Sevenoaks at race-meeting or wedding, and Pierre Falcon's rebel songs were sung at every dance. But of a lesser rebellion, a quietly-laid plot to supplant the Governor of Assiniboia District and put another in his place, there was never a hint. Walter Melbourne, its instigator, was too wise for that; a very wolverine for caution was the "Chatake."

But he had left one weak spot in his armour of secrecy. He had spent the years of his exile in the north quietly laying his plans. A nature naturally disposed to be kindly, had been warped and embittered by some injustice in his sentence, and by a long exile in the north. So he had passed the winter of his discontent planning revenge. He had used Marcus Fraser as his tool. He had despised him so thoroughly that he had not troubled to take any of his usual precautions where he was concerned.

Marcus, indeed, in his old lethargic days was but a paltry force to be reckoned with. But he was a man again, and especially alert to any danger that might menace the friend who had rescued him from the pit. And rummaging one day in his cassette he found an old letter that Melbourne had once shown him and had forgotten again. It was a letter written by Chief Factor MacNeill to his nephew, and contained a full, though carefully-veiled, account of their plans to have the Governor removed. Fraser

was about to throw the letter into the fire when something made him hesitate. Instead, he wrote a full explanation of its contents and sent both by runner to Fort Mackenzie.

Chief Factor McPherson was a loyal friend to the Governor. The winter packet had been sent off, and so a special messenger had to be dispatched to Fort Garry. And, remembering the gallant, unconquerable spirit of the young Chief of Fort Hearne, who had danced away his melancholy in the lonely outpost, he brought him down to Fort Mackenzie and sent him out with his message.

And so, all unconscious, Charles was hastening southward with the weapon for the downfall of his two enemies. He knew only that his message was urgent; that it must be in the hands of Governor McTavish before the Council met at Norway House.

The winter of his exile had opened suddenly into the spring of freedom. He had gone to the northland two winters before a hot-headed impetuous boy; he was returning a man, steady and restrained with something of the quiet patience of the land where he had spent his exile. The promise upon which his mother's faith had rested had not failed. The angels who had been given charge over him had kept him from the evil she had dreaded.

And now she whose prayers had set them on guard along his pathway had gone to the land of answered prayers where she could keep a more careful watch over her son. And so there were angels around and ahead of him on his perilous journey.

And a terrible journey it had been down the bitter winter trails of the northland. But his two sturdy Indian friends were with him, and his feet had been winged with hope and freedom.

And now the trackless forests and the icy wastes were past. They had crossed the Saskatchewan and here was Spring coming dancing up over the prairie hills to meet them. Wild geese called to each other through the grey skies, and at night as they slept by their fire the beat of strong northbound pinions passed over their heads.

They left their dogs and sled at a small post on the Saskatchewan and took to horses, and as Charles was asking for directions from the half-breed postmaster the man uttered a magic word.

"Fort Winnipegosis!" shouted Charles. "Where Chief Factor MacDonald is? No, we can't stay here the night. March, Boy!"

To see MacDonald again, and the Lady of Athabasca Lake! And they would be sure to have news of Flora! He set off at such a gallop that even the patient Young Thunder grunted uncomprehendingly and wondered audibly why Waby-stig-wan was in such desperate haste.

It was the custom for a Company brigade, whether travelling by land or water, to make a gallant approach to a fort, like the English coaches in the brave old days, that dashed into a village to the music of winding horns and galloping hoofs. In like manner the great stage-coaches of the Company came up to a post with flashing oars and singing boatmen, dashing dogs with jangling bells, or an advance cavalcade of galloping horses.

So though there were only three in his little company Charles determined that they should make a good appearance before the Lady of Lake Winnipegosis.

Before reaching the clearing surrounding the fort he had a bath in an icy pool of the Greenhill River, casting some of his most ragged clothing upon its sweeping current, much to the dismay of his frugal followers. He had bought a new shirt and sash at the last post, and so, dressed and mounted and looking like the prince who was suddenly changed from a pauper, he galloped down the bank of the stream and across the ford. He was as brown as Young Thunder and his blue eyes and his waving fair hair made a strange contrast, but he was as straight and as fine a young athlete as the day he first set foot on Rupert's Land.

And so he rode up to the fort like a young knight approaching a castle, rode out of the wilderness of his bitter exile, bearing the white shield of his honour all unsullied.

He rode blithely and eagerly, but with no faintest dream of the wonder awaiting him on the castle wall.

Fort Winnipegosis, the headquarters of the Winnipegosis District, stood northwest of the lake that gave it its name, and some twenty miles south of the great Saskatchewan. Here the rolling prairie country had almost reached the dignity of hills, and though there still spread out wide vistas of open grassy plains, the country was well dotted with parks, and the lakes and rivers were shrouded in luxuriant growth.

The fort stood upon a splendid hill overlooking the Greenhill River: a tangled twisted stream that eventually found its way down to the great lake. It was a neatly arranged place, for the Lady of Athabasca Lake reigned here, and already the touch of her hand could be seen.

All the buildings and the sixteen-foot stockade surrounding them were whitewashed, and gleamed in the spring sunshine against their velvety background of pine-clad hills.

Along the top of the log wall, facing the river, and stretching from the wide gates to either corner ran a platform, with a three-foot parapet. It made a pleasant promenade on summer evenings for the lady of the lone castle and her children.

Though spring had just commenced to sail up the frozen creeks and rivers, and rebel patches of snow in the woods and hollows still disputed her reign, the day was warm and the south wind was balmy.

"The snow is all gone from the castle wall, Alice," the Bourgeois said at breakfast that morning. "You must all walk there and wave us a welcome when we get back from our shooting."

"We surely will," said his wife. "Just one breath of that spring breeze from the prairie will bring back your roses, Flora mine," she cried gaily.

When Alice MacDonald had gone down to Red River with her husband the spring before, she had brought Flora

Carmichael back to spend the winter in her forest castle.

For early in the previous winter Mrs. Murray had closed her weary eyes on the bleak plains of her exile and gone home. When they had laid away in Kildonan churchyard the woman who had been her second mother Flora's brave spirit gave way before her grief and loneliness. Her pale face and altered looks made her uncle anxious, and he gave his consent to a winter with her friends.

He hoped, too, that the loneliness of such an isolated post would bring her to her senses, and show her how fortunate she was to be situated at Red River.

"And I hope you will reason with her," he said to her hostess before they left, "and try to make her see her duty. I don't know what the world is coming to when young women set themselves against all authority."

The winter passed peacefully away. Fort Winnipegosis was a bright place with the two little ones making sunshine through its bare rooms. The only trouble that marred the complete harmony of the place was the fact that the three young apprentice clerks all fell in love with Miss Carmichael and there was imminent danger of a three-cornered duel.

Alice MacDonald had no intention of interfering in Flora's matrimonial affairs. She was all for the banished prince but an event occurred shortly after their arrival home that settled Flora's mind and the fate of the three clerks for all time.

It was a piece of news that came to the fort out of the wilderness by way of the fort gossip, old Sally.

Sally was the wife of Simon the Indian horse-guard whose duty it was to watch over the four-hundred-odd horses belonging to the Company, that pastured on the rich uplands around the Greenhill River. Sally, like her husband was a pure Wood-Cree, with a face like an old brown moccasin, and a body as thin and agile as a wild-cat, for all her sixty-five years.

Her children were long since married and gone, and she lived with her husband here and there just wherever there was good pasture for the horses.

The old couple slept in the woods if woods were handy, but if not it was all the same, they slept out on the prairie under the stars. In the winter they carried their home about with them, a deer-skin cone-shaped lodge where Sally carried on her not too elaborate housekeeping.

Sally loved to come to the fort. She was passionately in love with little Helen May MacDonald, and she liked, too, to visit her old cronies who sat all day nodding in the sunshine of their windows, in their comfortable huts behind the fort. For all the old women, abandoned by their tribe when they were too feeble to follow, were comfortably housed and fed here under the MacDonalds' protection.

Sally had them all on her calling list and regularly dropped in for a cup of tea and a smoke and a bit of gossip. Then she always ended by a visit to old Bonhomme, the cook, and sat for an hour in the warm kitchen where the tea, the smoke and the gossip were all repeated.

Old Sally had come in one morning for her usual social call, and had brought a musk-rat for Helen May's dinner. She had no sooner left than the old man came shuffling in to Mrs. MacDonald's apartments to tell the sad news Sally had brought.

It appeared that the small-pox which had been raging all winter among the tribe of Stony Crees far up the north Saskatchewan had spread late in the winter to the southern branch where Chief Big Wind's people lived. And the old Chief and his six wives had all died of it and the beautiful maiden, his granddaughter, who had nursed them all through the days of terror and sickness, she, too, had been stricken and the whole tribe was mourning for her.

She was white and very beautiful this granddaughter of Big Wind's. She had come to her grandfather's lodge

one summer when the Company's boats came up the Saskatchewan. It was said that her father was a great Chief of the Company and had tried to force her to marry one she did not love, and so she had fled to her mother's people. And now she was gone forever, Bonhomme declared mournfully, and Father Benoit was saying a mass for her soul.

It was Father Benoit, travelling through the wild country on his mission of mercy, that confirmed Sally's tale. This beautiful white daughter of the Stonies had been a veritable angel of mercy to her people. And finally she had given her life for them, and the good priest was on his way down to Norway House to tell the Chief Factor the sad and noble ending of his daughter's story.

Alice MacDonald and her guest sat long over the fire that night. This, then, was the story of Marie Rose and that other tale had been born in an evil heart.

"If I had only believed in him," Flora Carmichael sobbed. "But I believed the first slanderous tale instead, and now he will never forgive me."

Alice MacDonald was very comforting. "Wait and see. I don't think he would find it very hard to forgive," she said with a smile at Flora's bent head shining in the fire-light.

And then they both sighed and whispered their tribute to the one who had gone out so gallantly. "Brave little Marie Rose!"

And now spring had come and it was impossible not to hope that something wonderful might happen any day. The very air had a thrill of expectancy in it.

Alice's prophecy regarding Flora's roses came true. The warm breeze brought them to her cheeks and they matched the crimson velvet of her cap as she ran a race across the enclosure with little Hector, Mrs. MacDonald and her small daughter following.

The four made a pretty picture, and Chief Trader MacDonald, burdened with the intruding spring work, had some ado to keep his clerks from the big bare windows

that commanded such an alluring view of the fort grounds.

The spring trade had begun to open and Indians were encamped in the groves around the fort, their horses grazing about. Sounds of laughter, shouting and hammering came up from the boathouse, where the brigade was preparing for their journey. In a few weeks the boats would go down to Norway House and the carts would leave for Fort Garry with their loads of pemmican and furs from the Winnipegosis District. A snatch of Pierre Falcon's rebel song floated up—"Les Bois-brules jetaient des cris de joie." Its gay defiance struck an answering chord in Flora Carmichael's heart. Spring was in the air—and hope! She tripped up the steps and along the castle wall in time to the gay lilt.

"Come and dance, Hector," she called holding out her hands:

"Sur le pont d'Avignon
Tout le monde y passe!"

She chanted the little folk song sung by all the French half-breed children.

Hector pranced joyfully before her, in his small yellow moccasins.

"Les messieurs sont comm' ci," he piped, his knitted touque pulled from his curly head, his small red-mittened hand spread over his stomach, as he made her a jerky little bow.

"Les dames sont comm' ca," the lady responded, holding out the skirt of her long fur coat and sweeping her small partner a curtsy, so deep his laughing eyes were on a level with hers.

Suddenly, for no reason she could give, she felt lighter of heart than she had since that autumn day she and Adelaide had walked in the coulee. Once more she was the old, gay, dauntless Flora.

Mrs. MacDonald and the fur-hooded, pink-cheeked fairy named Helen May, came toiling up the steps and they all

stood for a moment looking out over the bare, sunny hills. They could see far down the slope to where a swollen stream coming down from the north plunged joyously into the Greenhill River. They had both broken from their fetters only that morning and were shouting a song of liberty. From a wedge of wild ducks that clove the skies overhead, came an echoing cry; they, too, were away on a wild race for the open spaces. Little Hector shouted to them as they passed overhead and danced up and down ecstatically.

The old song she had not sung for many months came to Flora's lips:

“And as I rode by Dalton Hall,
Beneath the turrets high,
A maiden on the castle wall
Was singing merrily;

“O, Brignal Banks are fresh and fair,
And Greta Woods are green,
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English Queen!”

Three horsemen rode out from the willows upon the opposite bank of the leaping stream and descended to a ford farther down.

The two women leaned over the parapet and watched the water splashing in silver from the horses' feet.

“White man!” Hector announced, his quick eyes, trained to Indian acuteness by Simon and Sally, taking note of the subtle difference between the man ahead and the two who followed.

“The first one is a white man and the other two are Stonies, I think—or sompin.”

Mrs. MacDonald shaded her eyes with her hand. “How nice if it should be Mr. Halliday from Fort Hampton,” she said. White visitors were rare and joyously welcomed.

The white man's horse was eager and hard to hold. When he had mounted the bank of the stream he came across the level at a swift gallop, and pranced and curvetted up to the fort wall where the ladies stood.

"It's not Mr. Halliday," Hector said.

"Perhaps it's—" suggested his mother and paused. The rider was right beneath them now; he took off his cap and sat staring up at Flora like a man in a dream. The girl on the wall gave a little stifled cry and stood staring down as if she too were caught by some wild vision. This was a dream, she kept saying to herself as she held tight by the parapet lest she fall. This was certainly a dream. Things did not happen like this in real life.

The man on the horse came to life first. "*I did* hear it, then," he whispered. "It was 'Brignal Banks'!"

But it was Alice MacDonald who broke the spell. "It's the Young Chevalier!" she cried. "It's Prince Charlie come back!"

And then Charles's restless steed had carried him past them and through the gate, his Indian companions clattering after him, and suddenly the dream maiden on the castle wall also came to life. She forgot everything but that her Prince had returned, that Edmund was back from exile, and she ran down the steps, her hands outstretched.

"Please say you forgive me!" were her first words.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"Longer Than the Sun Shines and Waters Run"

"I WOULDN'T regret anything," Flora said that night, as they sat very late by Mrs. MacDonald's sitting-room fire, and talked over the long years of separation, and explained everything again and again; "I wouldn't regret anything, if I had only trusted you in spite of all the pelicans that ever flew." She repeated it over and over, with such beautiful and humble contrition, that Charles was moved to explain that she had not really doubted him in her heart, proving it in such a masterly fashion that she finally agreed.

Indeed, they were too happy to be troubled long over vain regrets. Even the treachery of the Pelican and the sad story of Marie Rose's heroic death could not lessen the magic of their brief days together.

"You'll gain time," MacDonald said that evening as they sat at dinner, "if you wait till the ice has left the Greenhill sufficiently to make the rest of the journey in a canoe." And Charles accepted the invitation with profound gratitude, praying fervently that a real Mackenzie River frost might descend upon the waters of the Greenhill and linger far into the summer.

The first meal in Fort Winnipegosis in the big, bare, sunny dining-room, with his old friend MacDonald at the head of the table, and the Guardian Angel of the place at the foot, and with Flora, starry-eyed and radiant, opposite him, was so like the dreams he had visioned in the smoky old Indian Hall at Fort Hearne that Charles felt he must surely awake and hear the wolves howling outside and see the Aurora flaring against Stuart the First's frosted window panes.

But if Mrs. MacDonald and his old Chief were not yet

quite real, and Flora was nothing but a lovely airy vision, the others around the table were flesh and blood, and the sight of them helped to keep his feet on the earth. Old Bonhomme, the cook, whom the MacDonalds had brought with them from Athabasca House, padded about, all smiles at seeing the Young Chevalier again, and served a wonderful meal of beaver-tails, especially prepared for the guest. Little Hector expressed complete approval of the visitor, as he had done at Athabasca House. He had been promoted to a low seat at his mother's left hand, while in his old high-chair sat the smiling, apple-cheeked usurper, a lovely picture, with her mother's fair hair and her father's dark eyes.

To Charles's dismay he found that the three young men looked upon him as a hero, partly because of his experiences in the Northland, but more because it was quite apparent that he was an old friend of Miss Carmichael's.

The revolving season took no thought for the long-divided lovers. The sunshine poured down on Winnipegosis District, melting the snow patches in the valleys and steadily shrinking the ice-floes in the river. And one day the brown, bare land smiled out through a silver mist, and threw off the chains of winter. Duty's stern finger pointed down the way the opening river ran, and the Young Chevalier must obey.

It was the third day of his brief visit, that they had their long-deferred ride together. It was a poet's April morning; the sky a blinding blue sea, with dazzling white-winged ships sailing across it, the rolling prairie a flashing panorama of pools and sloughs, copies of the blue heavens with white clouds mirrored in their shining depths. On every side streams leaped and shouted as they raced down the hills to join the Greenhill River. The riders halted their horses on a dry height in the shelter of an elm grove, and Charles pointed to the shining procession of little ice rafts.

"They are telling me that I must be doing the same to-morrow," he said.

"And I must leave for Fort Garry with the cart brigade, and you will go back to exile," she faltered.

"But it will be for only one more winter," Charles said comfortingly. "They must let me out then or I shall resign." And she repeated bravely, "Only one more winter." But it sounded like a year of winters to them both.

"And I won't mind anything now," he added, "when I know that you will be waiting for me to come back." He paused, awed and humbled by the wonder of it.

They were silent for a time, saddened by the sudden termination of their magic days together.

"I must hear you sing 'Brignal Banks' before I leave," Charles said, trying to lighten the gloom about them.

She threw him a daring glance. "I'd sing, 'Cam ye by Athol,' if you'd ask me," she said, toying with her horse's mane. She warbled softly the refrain of the old song:

"Follow thee, follow thee! Wha wadna' follow thee?"

Charles looked at her speechless. The glorious daring of her! "Oh!" he whispered, when he could speak, "you must not say things like that. Don't tempt me!"

"I wouldn't be afraid," she said, holding her head up in the gallant little way she had.

He shook his head. "But I would. Think of you on those northern trails—and at Fort Hearne!"

"Alice went to Lake Athabasca," she argued.

For one rapturous moment Charles had a vision of travelling with her to the Mackenzie. There was a missionary with his wife at Fort Mackenzie, and the lady seemed very happy; and Mrs. MacDonald had taken that journey to Lake Athabasca. But the memory of the struggles of the Long Portage, the rapids of the Athabasca and the Slave rivers, the cold wet nights, the poor food and the many privations steadied him. He shook his head, but he could not yet speak for the humble gratitude that filled his heart.

"So you won't have me, sir?" she cried, quick to see how deeply he was moved and turning swiftly to a lighter mood. "To think that I've stooped to offer myself and have been refused!

" 'Slighted love is sair tae bide,
Ha, ha! the wooin' o't! "

she sang lugubriously.

They laughed then, to hide their deeper feelings, and, giving rein to their horses, they fled away down the trail the girl ahead, the sunshine glinting on her golden hair.

But before they rode back to the white-walled fort they paused beside a willow clump, and, hand in hand, plighted their troth anew. They were very grave, knowing that miles of lake and forest and empty wilderness would soon stretch between them, and that she must meet the hostility of her uncle alone. But nothing mattered now; they would be true—

"As long as the sun shines and waters run," Charles said, solemnly repeating the formula of all Indian treaties.

"As long as the sun shines and waters run, Waby-stigwan," the girl echoed softly.

They looked at each other for a moment with misty eyes, and then hers shone with the glorious thought that their love would outlive even the sunshine and the flash and song of the river at their feet.

"Longer than the sun shines and waters run," she whispered, her lovely eyes full of tears; and Charles repeated it triumphantly.

And the Greenhill, leaping past, singing his song of freedom and his prophecy of spring, echoed the promise:

"Longer than the sun shines and waters run."

CHAPTER XXIX

Revoyage

NORWAY HOUSE had not yet awakened to its summer activity when Charles and his two Indian guides paddled across Playgreen Lake. The great loom upon which the shuttles of boats and carts moved back and forth, weaving a web of commerce across the wide land had scarcely begun its swift summer work, for the ice still held the northern streams.

Had Charles suddenly arisen out of the depths of Playgreen Lake, Johnny McBain could not have been more astounded than when his friend stepped from a birch-bark canoe to the shore. They fell upon each other in the madness of their joy, and from that moment Charles's coming resembled more the return of a conquering hero than a banished outlaw.

Though it was a relief to find Cameron gone, Charles's heart smote him when he heard that the Chief Factor had failed in health after the news of his daughter's death. He had left for a furlough in the Old Country, and no one knew when he would return. His position was occupied by a man mighty in the ranks of the Family Compact, Chief Factor Findlay, who had been promoted from a position in the west to this most important post. But Charles was distinctly disappointed to find that MacNeill was not coming to the Council. He had experienced a fierce joy in the thought of meeting the tyrant again, and his blood leaped at the hope of encountering the man who had invented the slander concerning Marie Rose. But fortunately for the peace of Norway House, neither of his enemies appeared. The two conspirators wisely absented themselves from the scene where they hoped their plans were to come to fruition.

Governor McTavish arrived in a few days and the message that had come out of the Northland was at last delivered. It resulted in the Governor holding a secret conference with a few of his trusted friends and returning hurriedly to Fort Garry, while the atmosphere about Norway House was full of wild speculation.

While Charles waited for the Athabasca Brigade to take him back to exile, many of his old friends came in from various points. Halliday, his gay polish worn to a shabby discouragement, came down from the Swan River District bearing good news of Archie, who was placed within thirty miles of him.

A few days later Campbell arrived with Governor McTavish in the Red River boats from Fort Garry, and the four old friends had a grand reunion in Johnny McBain's room.

And at last the Winnipegosis brigade, under MacDonald, came sweeping into port bringing a very bulky letter for Charles.

Flora wrote on the eve of leaving for the long cart journey to Red River. Her face was turned southward, his would soon be turned northward, but her heart was high and her letter full of cheer.

Norway House took on its summer aspect of a busy metropolis; boats and canoes lined the shore, voyageurs, Indians and bearded officers crowded the walks. Sounds of hammering and shouting came from the boathouses, the flag waved above the green sward.

The Council sat behind closed doors. It was a momentous meeting. While Charles had been in the north great events had been marching forward. The Company in the Old Land was negotiating for the transfer of Rupert's Land to the Dominion of Canada and the country was in a ferment. The French half-breeds, differing in religion and race from the Red River settlers, were dreaming of independence. The Indians were restless and suspicious. There was no help forthcoming from the powers at Ottawa, and the burden of a great country likely to burst

into flame at any moment was bowing the head and whitening the hair of many a Chief Factor.

But the young apprentice clerks were not troubled by affairs of State, and Charles had worries of his own. He wandered down by the shore one evening, waiting for MacDonald to come out and take a farewell walk. The meeting of the Council was almost over, the Athabasca Brigade would sail in a few days and take him back to the land of bondage. It was just such a night three years ago that Marie Rose had stolen up the shore in her canoe and given him his warning. He thought of her tenderly. His own happiness reproached him when he remembered the tragedy of her life.

"It's a wonderful night, Stuart." It was his old friend Campbell coming down for his evening smoke. "You'll be gone in a few days, I suppose." They walked along in silence for a few minutes. "Ah, laddie," he continued, "you should have taken my advice! MacNeill's an ill man to cross." Charles glanced at his old friend's stooped figure. Campbell had grown grey in the service; he was painstaking and faithful, but he had no friends in the Council and there was little hope of his ever being promoted. They walked on in sympathetic silence.

A canoe skimmed out from the shore across the placid mirror of the lake, a whip-poor-will reiterated his complaint from the darkening wooded hill behind the fort, and a bittern answered with his hoarse call.

Johnny McBain, whom Charles had last seen in the Chief Factor's garden strolling with one of the Bourgeois's dusky half-breed daughters, suddenly appeared alone, walking briskly towards them.

"Losh keep us!" cried Charles in the heavy broad Scots which he and Johnny still affected when together. "Can ye bide a wee frae the lassie?"

"Haud yer whisht," retorted Johnny rather shortly. "Congratulate me, Charlie," he added, "I've been promoted."

Though Charles knew that nothing better than Fort

Hearne was in store for him, his generous heart thrilled at the news.

"Good for you, old Johnny!" He grasped his friend's hand. "Hoot, mon!" he cried delightedly, "ye'll be a Chief Factor yet, foreby!" He slapped his chum on the back. "An' it's because ye merit it, ma braw lad, not marrit it!" he added jovially. But the joke seemed to fall flat. Johnny's face even in the dusk showed his embarrassment. Campbell put his hand upon the young man's shoulder and laughed softly.

"Who's the happy lady, Johnny?" he whispered.

Johnny McBain looked at him apologetically. "Miss Findlay," he stammered. "We're to be married right away. Great luck for me, eh?" he added, turning to Charles with a heavy attempt at looking happy.

Charles was so astounded he was incapable of speech. Poor old Johnny, who had always warned them all against this very pitfall!

Campbell's eyes were twinkling. "Considering our relative positions," he commenced, quoting Sanderson, but Johnny McBain cut him short.

"Don't, please!" he groaned. He turned to Charles, "Do you know what they had in store for me? Mackenzie River! Yes, Old Murder got that put on my programme before he left for home! But I've circumvented the old bear this time. Chief Factor Findlay won't let me go now!"

Charles remained alone in the dusk after the others had left him, walking up and down. In spite of his own happiness he could not but be sad for his friends. Poor Johnny had not been able to stand out against the hardships of the life. Campbell, for all his ability, would never be promoted, and he himself was to be sent off to the ends of the earth! He felt his blood grow hot over the injustice of it all. MacDonald came out of the darkness into the light that was still reflected from the lake; his step was quick, his voice eager.

"Great news, Stuart!" he cried, holding out his hand.

"Hamilton has been transferred to Swan River District and I've asked for you and I've got you!"

"Do you mean—you don't mean—" stammered Charles.

"That you are to be placed at Fort Winnipegosis! That's exactly what I mean!"

"Would you mind saying that again?" asked Charles after a moment's silence. "Because I know you couldn't possibly be saying what I thought I heard!"

CHAPTER XXX

Fort Winnipegosis

MANY times that wonderful autumn in Fort Winnipegosis, Charles told himself that it was too good to be true and that he would wake up and find himself superintending the hanging of the fish on the bleak stages of Fort Hearne. At any time Fort Winnipegosis, presided over by the Lady of Athabasca Lake, would have seemed a Paradise to him; but with Flora only a few hundred miles away, at Red River, and waiting for him, he would not have changed places with the Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company.

Before leaving Norway House he had written her a voluminous letter and sent it down by the boats going to Fort Garry. In it he enclosed another for Murray asking formally for the hand of his niece. For the prospective accountant of the Winnipegosis District could ask for favours to which the banished apprentice clerk dared not aspire.

And so he settled down to his new work with what was almost a contented mind. The north had taught him patience, and MacDonald promised that he should go down with the carts to Fort Garry early in the spring.

He often caught himself struck by the happy thought of what joy his good fortune would bring to his mother, to be followed by a swift pang with the memory that she was gone. And yet sometimes, as he lay listening to the waters of the Greenhill murmuring along under the stars, and remembered that love would outrun its current, he felt that she must know, and was rejoicing with him. It seemed impossible that anything could happen to him of which his mother would be unaware. He thought of her much in

these days of his happiness; thought of her prayers and her serene faith. He wondered if even his exile to the north, into which he had gone with such hot rebellion, would appear to her as something divinely ordered. He did not realise that he might have regarded it as the voyage of a rescue ship to pick up a poor castaway on a desert island. He was too depreciative of self to guess at all he had meant in the life of Marcus Fraser. And he was not sufficiently introspective to recognise the fact that the years of hardship had put strong fibre into a character too accustomed to finding the road of life delightfully easy.

But he did realise vividly that the trip to the Mackenzie had given him MacDonald as his life-long friend, and the injustice done him had helped to make Flora his champion. And in the light of these two glorious facts he could not regret the years of his banishment.

He knew MacDonald's high sense of duty and realised that he would not place his own brother in a position of trust unworthily, and he was determined to show that he had made no mistake this time. He plunged into his new work with an energy that surprised even the hard-working exacting chief. The north had taught him the value of toil. It had been his salvation there, and now it had become his habit. There was plenty to do, for this was no Fort Hearne. Summer and early Autumn were the seasons when every fort took stock of its possessions. Everything in and about the whole establishment had to be counted, weighed, valued, and duly recorded in the Company's books, from the number of pewter spoons old Bonhomme used in his kitchen to the latest little colt in the farthest off coulee under the care of old Simon.

Fort Winnipegosis, he found, was unlike any other post under the Company, just as Athabasca House had been. The gracious atmosphere of home enfolded everything here. On the sunny side of the big building a flower garden bloomed, and on warm days the perfume of mignonette and pinks and rosemary floated in through the windows, taking Charles back to his mother's garden and the shady

arbour where they used to drink tea on summer afternoons. Something of the same sweet fragrance hung over the whole establishment. The young men all felt it and did homage in their hearts to the reigning spirit of the place.

Mrs. MacDonald had a motherly eye for one and all. She protected young Leith, the new green clerk, and one born to trouble as the sparks to fly upward, from many a pitfall laid by the other young men. She put a gentle, but firm check upon young Carruthers's tendency to gamble and Harborough's to drink. When Charles would stride into Bachelors' Hall after a ride over the range with old Simon and throw his saddle on the floor or leave his capote lying on a bench, he would afterwards find the articles neatly hung in their proper places with a little note affixed, bearing the motto: "A place for everything and everything in its place."

She discovered early that he was recklessly generous, and that he was always overdrawing his allowance of tea and tobacco for presents. And she gently reminded him that he must save his money now if he were to make a home within the next few years. Her instinct to mother everything reached out to the fort employees: Daniel, the Scottish-Cree interpreter and his French wife, the half-breed servants and boatmen; even old Simon, the horse-guard and his wife Sally, who lived a semi-savage life on the outskirts of the district, felt her kindly presence.

There was another gracious and refining presence at Fort Winnipegosis. Every morning as Charles sat in his office grappling with the far-reaching business of the Winnipegosis District, there would come a soft shuffle of little moccasins along the hall that led to the MacDonalds' apartments, and young Hector and his tiny sister would arrive for their morning visit. They rarely came alone. Hector had a little brown retinue of Indian and half-breed children, whom he drilled daily, and from whom a chosen comrade was always allowed to accompany them. And Helen May generally dragged by the hand one of her willing slaves, Daniel, the interpreter, Bonhomme, the

cook, or more often Old Sally, who was her most devoted servitor.

Even on the days when Hector was too busy drilling the little brown army down by the river to attend to social duties, Helen May always came, for she discovered the first day that the new officer was a source of high entertainment. He was a talented performer, and every morning she put him through his paces.

"Goo' mornin'," she would say, dropping him an infinitesimal curtsy, "Tan oo sing Doodle-doo, dis mornin', please?"

Thus graciously invited Charles would clear his throat, mount upon his high stool, flap his arms and repeat in a high chanticleer voice:

"Cock-a-doodle doo!
Hens and chickens too!
Master broke his fiddle-stick
And don't know what to doodle-doodle-d-o-o-o-O!"

Helen May screamed with laughter at every performance, and as Stuart was a very difficult name for a baby tongue to encompass she named him in reward for his talents "Mitter Doodle-doo."

Helen May's most intimate friend was Old Sally, and she enjoyed Charles's performance as much as her little chum.

The two made a strange contrast as they stood in the morning sunlight at Charles's door, the rose-cheeked fairy, with her golden curls all neatly brushed and shining, holding in her soft, dimpled hand Sally's leathern claw, and the old woman, bronzed and weather-beaten and incredibly wrinkled, with her black, bead-like eyes twinkling in her brown face.

"Goo' mornin', Doodle-doo!" Helen May would say, dropping her small curtsy, "Here's Sally," she would add proudly. "Make a curtsy, Sally."

Old Sally would bob down and up and down again

several times with the ease and agility of one who many times a day leaped from the ground to her horse and tore away over hill and dale. Then she would catch the little girl in her arms and kiss her ecstatically, and Helen May, well pleased, would command, "Now kiss Doodle-doo, Sally," fearing that Charles might feel neglected. And Old Sally, very willing, would rush up to Waby-stig-wan and give him a sounding smack, redolent of her old pipe.

The evenings in Bachelors' Hall where, with the three clerks, he smoked his pipe before the fire were the height of luxury after his winters at Fort Hearne and the many happy evenings spent at Mrs. MacDonald's fireside were a foretaste of the dream home which he was building. The three clerks recognised the newcomer as the blighter of all their hopes, but now that Miss Carmichael was gone they consoled themselves with the thought that probably he was as much deserted as they and had the fellow feeling that makes even rivals wondrous kind.

To Charles's intense amusement, Wallace Leith persisted in regarding him as a great explorer.

"What luck you have had, Mr. Stuart! Only four years in the country, and think of all the places you've seen. I wish they'd send me to Mackenzie District."

"Nothing easier in Rupert's Land than to get sent," Charles assured him grimly, and proceeded to give him an unvarnished picture of the gaiety of a winter at Fort Hearne.

"It's no use, Wally," declared Harborough, a long-limbed young Englishman, with a languid, disdainful manner, "you can't arrive at a Chief Factorship by that road, my boy. The only way to improve one's position in this rotten service is to marry a half-breed or get shot by the Young Dogs."

"Oh! the service isn't too bad, after all," put in Caruthers, the other clerk, who always disagreed with his fellow-officer on principle. "Think of the position it gives one."

"Position!" Harborough groaned. "What is the differ-

ence, now, between selling silk handkerchiefs and tea and tobacco here and selling them in a shop in Glasgow? Except that it's a dashed sight cleaner and more comfortable at home."

Carruthers rushed into the argument.

"Do you mean to say that you see no difference between a draper's clerk and an officer of the Honourable Hudson's Bay Company of Gentlemen Adventurers?"

"The Honourable Gentlemen Adventurers be hanged! It's just a great big draper's establishment, and you and I are clerks behind its counter—without the pay! Twenty-five pounds a year! The dirrt! as Daniel says."

There was no ill-will in these debates which took place every evening. On the whole Charles enjoyed them and found the two young men excellent company. Wallace Leith was the most entertaining and original of the trio. He had just arrived from the Old Land, and from the first had shown a strong disinclination to be taught anything. He was always rushing in where seasoned interpreters feared to tread, and was constantly getting himself and the rest of the white population of the fort into serious difficulties.

Whatever trials he created for the Bourgeois and Daniel, the interpreter, Mr. Leith was a constant source of hilarity in Bachelors' Hall. He managed sooner or later to set every one in the fort against him, and he stirred up his first disagreement with the new accountant by taking a fastidious dislike to his two Indian friends from the north.

After their return from Norway House the two young Chipewyans hung about the fort, often dropping in to see if there was any chance of Waby-stig-wan moving on to some other post. There was a strong odour about all the Indian visitors, especially on a day when the fire roared in the chimney and the Indian Hall was warm, but the aroma from Young Thunder and his comrade was particularly offensive to Mr. Leith's nostrils.

"You'll really have to get those valets of yours fumi-

gated, Stuart," he would say. "Does the North Pole really smell so fishy?"

Charles, remembering all the devoted services of his two comrades, how they had starved that he might eat, and frozen that he might be warm on the long hard trails of the north, was righteously indignant. His revenge, however, came suddenly and was more deadly than he could have wished.

Chief Yellow Head, the ruler of the Indians of the district, rode up in splendour one day with his mounted braves for a farewell visit before departing for his winter's trapping and hunting.

After all the ceremonies and giving of presents were over, MacDonald bespoke his interest in the two Chipewyans, and before the summer was past Charles had the pleasure of seeing his two protégés settled with plenty of ammunition, and each with a Wood-Cree wife to cook his meals and clean his furs.

CHAPTER XXXI

The Lost Comrade

A FEW weeks after Thunder and Lightning had left him, Charles made his first journey into the surrounding district. Taking a couple of servants, and accompanied by Harborough and young Leith he rode out on a tour of inspection to a few outlying posts.

A lovely mild autumn had covered the prairie with cloth of gold, and touched the wooded hills and river banks with warm crimson.

Travelling at this time of year was a delight, for the nights were still mild and the evil pests of flies and mosquitoes, that so often made the summer a torment, were gone.

They had passed a few miles beyond the first wooded belt of hills when, early in the evening, they came upon a small Indian encampment. A dozen or so of the men were squatted around the fire gambling with cherry stones, while another group before a deerskin lodge were making merry. They were being entertained by a tall young fellow very grandly dressed in a pair of blue cloth trousers and an old high silk hat worn at a very jaunty angle over one ear.

It was evident, even at a distance, that the young buck had obtained some free-trader whisky and under its exhilarating influence he was giving a demonstration of how the foolish white folk danced down at Norway House. He tripped up unsteadily to a young squaw and offered his arm. She arose, giggling and shame-faced, amid shrieks of laughter and, while the nimble Pau-pau-kee-wis hopped around her, stood awkward and hysterical trying to follow his instructions. The ravine rang with the laughter of the audience squatted in a circle about them.

Riding nearer, Charles noticed something familiar in the dancing figure as well as in the trousers and hat.

"Why, it's my man Friday!" he cried delighted. "Ho, boy, Young Thunder! Ho, Lightning!"

The two young men came running towards him, Young Thunder stepping high and airily in a state of pleasant intoxication. Lightning was in even a worse condition, and after giving them some tobacco, Charles harangued them solemnly on the evils of fire-water and warned them to trade only at the fort and to avoid the free trader and his bad medicine.

He rode away considerably disturbed. The position of the two strangers was at best not any too safe, and where the free-trader and his whisky came there was sure to be trouble.

Wallace Leith, who had ridden ahead, waited for him and Harborough.

"I really can't endure the horrible odour of those Esquimaux of yours, Stuart," he said shuddering.

"We'll have to requisition a bottle of smelling-salts for you in our next order, Leith," Charles answered dryly. "You're nostrils are too delicate. And, by the way, Chipewyans are no more Esquimaux than you are."

Wallace rode on ahead whistling gaily, all undisturbed.

They camped that night in a pleasant little coulee, and when they had eaten a delicious supper of prairie chicken which Baptiste and Moses had prepared over the fire, they lay on the ground and smoked in great content. The evening was warm and still; a wonderful clear, early autumn evening; the smoke from their fire went straight up into the opal sky. Charles lay dreaming day dreams with his back to the setting sun, and his face towards the south like a devout Mohammedan facing his Mecca. He was trying to fancy he could see the place where the Assiniboine River joined the Red, and the settlement along their banks some four hundred miles away.

Suddenly the sweet, fresh, evening air was poisoned by a deadly odour. Charles, raising himself upon his elbow,

saw a little black-and-white animal moving along with easy indifference in the grass above the coulee.

Young Leith's head also came up from the grass. "Perfectly shocking odour, old man. Have your valets followed us?" He arose indignantly. "There must be something dead round here. Say, stir up old Moses, like a good fellow, and tell him to look around. Say, it's frightful, don't you know."

Harborough sat up and looked about. He, too, saw the little black-and-white miscreant, and a thought as evil and deadly sprang into his head.

"Why, Stuart," he cried, "look! I do believe that's Helen May's little fox-terrier, the one we lost last June. Yes, sir, that's Wee Willie Winkie or I'm an Indian! Her Majesty would give a good bit to get him back. Wonder if Baptiste could catch him."

"We really must try to capture him," Charles contributed to the wicked plot. "Perhaps he knows us and that's why he's staying around."

They whistled and called, but the little black-and-white dog kept on his slow care-free way and was disappearing in the dusk of the willows when poor Wallace rose to the bait.

"I'm going to see if I can catch him," he declared, generously. "This is a rotten place to stay anyway." He plunged down the bank, calling and whistling, and the two initiated Rupert's Landers rolled over on the ground and smothered their wicked laughter in their blankets. The little dog trotted away, and the faster he went the faster followed the unsuspecting pursuer. He had not the faintest notion that this harmless looking little dog with the bushy tail was the most deadly animal of the prairie and more to be feared than a grizzly bear or a mad buffalo bull. And his false friends were silent—even Charles hardened his heart, remembering all Wallace had said about Young Thunder. And so they let him go on to his doom.

He slept that night alone on the windward side of the

coulee, driven beyond the camp like the lepers of old. And for the rest of the journey he was made to travel far behind, for even the ill-smelling Young Thunder, who had so often offended his delicate nostrils, would have spurned him.

The short autumn was almost over and a flurry of snow was descending when the three travellers returned to the fort. They were welcomed warmly and in the evening sat round the roaring fire in Mrs. MacDonald's sitting-room. The children were allowed to sit up a little later to celebrate. Little Helen May sat on Doodle-doo's knee and told him in a queer dialect of French and Cree all the great doings of the fort and of Sally's visit in his absence.

Wallace appeared, his old dapper self, having had a bath and new clothing. But when Young Thunder came silently into the Indian Hall that evening as they were putting away everything for the night Mr. Leith made no reference to the young Chipewyan's unpleasantness.

Young Thunder seemed to be in deep distress, and had come to Waby-stig-wan for help. Charles could gather from him only that some calamity had befallen both him and Lightning, but was not quite clear as to its nature, so he sent out to the men's quarters for Daniel Morrison. The interpreter was a long, lean half-breed, with a Scottish father and a Cree mother. He spoke French and English and a half-dozen Indian dialects, all with a strong and musical Aberdeen accent, and had an even stronger Aberdeen pride. He cordially despised all French half-breeds, and generally referred to the pure Indian as "the dirrt."

Daniel was rather disgusted at being roused from his warm cabin and his pipe at this late hour.

"A'm no night-hawk, me myself," he grumbled, as he came shuffling in.

Young Thunder's story was tragic enough to soften even his heart. It appeared that the two young men had not given heed to Waby-stig-wan's warning against the free-trader's fire-water. There had been a great deal of it

passed about down at the camp, and Young Thunder's party had got into a fight with some of the Young Dogs, a small Indian tribe who were camping near, during which poor Lightning had been wounded. Young Thunder had put him on a cart and brought him down to the fort, in the child-like hope that Waby-stig-wan would cure him as he had cured Young Thunder of the bear's wound on the Great Slave River. But his friend had died on the way down, and the boat-builder had let him put the body in the boat-house when he arrived early in the evening.

This was heavy news surely, but Young Thunder went on to tell more. It appeared that when he found that Oskineque was dying on the trail, he had begged his friend not to leave him, declaring that they could not part, and that if he must go, Young Thunder would accompany him. Oskineque had heard the promise, and then, without replying, he had gone out into the Land of Spirits. And now, having considered the matter in the light of day, with the glamor of the free trader's fire-water removed, Young Thunder hesitated to redeem his pledge. He had placed the body of his friend in the boat-house and gone off to the woods to think it over. And now he was returned, determined to see his friend and beg him not to hold him to his hastily given promise. He was sure Oskineque would let him off if he understood, and Young Thunder would explain, and would also make an offering of his horse and some blankets for his friend to use in the Happy Hunting Ground. And so he had come to see if Waby-stig-wan would get the key of the boat-house and come with him while he spoke to the departed.

Daniel was not at all inclined to go for the key. He was disposed to pooh-pooh the whole matter.

Why bother about the dirrt? They were always drinking and fighting and killing one another. And it was only some heathen notion the fellow had in his foolish head. Let him wait till morning.

But Young Thunder was desperately in earnest, and as

he stood there, looking with anxious, beseeching eyes from one to the other, he needed no one to plead for him with Waby-stig-wan.

"Get the key of the boat-house, Daniel, like a good fellow," Charles said, "and we'll see what we can do. And Lightning's gone, poor lad!"

Daniel, still grumbling, went off for the key, and Young Thunder, with a flash of relief in his eyes, disappeared after him into the darkness. Daniel returned with the key, lighted a lantern, and led the way out through the gate and down to the boat-house, which was built outside the stockade. He unlocked the big creaking door, and the two men entered. The big, dark space was strewn with sawdust and curled shavings, and filled with the clean odour of tar and the sweet smell of new-sawn lumber. The swinging light of the lantern showed a pile of boards in one corner, and on it was stretched a still figure, covered with a blanket. Daniel closed the door quickly, for the wind was sweeping down the hills beyond the river, rattling the loosely-made building and swaying the blanket about the still sleeper in a ghostly fashion.

Young Thunder had not yet reappeared. He was evidently preparing himself for the ceremony of addressing the dead. Charles moved over to the pile of boards, removed the shrouding blanket, and stood gazing down at the quiet form. Oskineque lay like a recumbent bronze statue of perfect modelling, sublime in the calm of death. The faithful brown hands that had paddled Charles so skilfully over many a desperate rapid lay stiffly along his sides. The willing feet that had run so many weary miles for him were still. There was something that brought a lump into Charles's throat in the sight of the worn moccasins, still damp from their last tramp through the melting snow.

The big creaking door of the boat-house opened and closed again, the blanket draped at Oskineque's feet stirred, the lantern flared up, and out of the shadows into its ring of light slowly stalked Young Thunder. He was stripped to the waist, though the night had turned bitterly

cold. He had blackened his face and body with charcoal in lieu of funeral garments, and wore only his blanket, held loosely about his waist and trailing behind him with a ghostly sound. He was indeed an awesome sight as the light of the lantern, which Daniel raised, fell upon his black face and gleaming eyes. The imposing figure advanced slowly till it halted at the foot of the bier. Holding his blanket draped about him, he stood as still and as statuesque as the body that lay stretched before him. Then, slowly extending his hand, Young Thunder addressed the corpse.

Charles stood back reverently in the shadows, while Daniel squatted beside him on his heels and whispered an occasional interpretation, or ejaculated "the dirrt," when the outpouring became too elaborate for his understanding.

It was really a masterful oration, and Charles listened in wonder. Young Thunder had not come to bury his Cæsar, but to praise him. And the listener had to confess that this unlettered Antony, in his Roman toga of green blanket, who had had only the woods and the streams to teach him, was no mean rival of Shakespeare's orator.

Like all Indians, he started far away from his subject. "The moon of the snows is here. On all the hills the wind blows keen. The hunter leaves his lodge to seek for food and clothing. He hunts the togony to his lair. From every lodge there rises a cry of mourning like the smoke from the fires of a hundred winter camps. The cry rises like the sound of the Rabisca in the moon of floods. What is this? Why are our women and our children weeping when there are deer on the hills and the food is abundant? The trees of the forest are fallen! The sun is darkened! My friend is dead! We shall never see his like again. His heart was wider than the plains of the Badger Holes and clearer than the waters of the Lake of the Marshes. My heart is sore that my friend has gone to the Land of the Shadows. . . ."

He went on with stately gestures and many a fine-flow-

ing sentence to beg his friend to release him from his promise. He had spoken on the impulse of the moment and under the influence of the fire-water. It was bad medicine. He asked that Oskineque forgive him. He could not go with him just now. He had his wife, and Waby-stig-wan would need him when the Young Dogs came down to take the fort. He would buy himself off if Oskineque would forgive him and not think him false to his vows. He had spoken in haste when the fire-water was in his brain, and he had spoken unwisely. He ended by pathetically begging his friend never to forget him, promising again and again that he would never be forgotten for the great love that had been between them.

Charles was deeply moved. He was reminded of the mourning of David for his friend: "How are the mighty fallen. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan."

Next morning Young Thunder performed the second part of the ceremony. He shot his horse, threw some of his blankets and household goods into the Greenhill, as an offering to the gods, and went back to his hunting, satisfied that justice had been done and his friend's soul was at rest.

CHAPTER XXXII

Chief Yellow Head

NEWS travelled slowly through Rupert's Land, especially in the winter, and Fort Winnipegosis was off the main highways of travel by cart or boat. Nevertheless, during the autumn, stories of disturbances among the Indians and half-breeds at Red River had come drifting northward. Most of the tales were too extravagant to be credited; the Company had given the country over to the Metis who were to share it with the Indians; the Americans had come over with an army and taken possession of Fort Garry and all the Company's officers had been murdered; Louis Riel was king, and the whole population of the Red River Settlement had fled as they had done in the days of Selkirk.

At first MacDonald heard these rumours undisturbed. "Old wives' tales," he would say laughingly to his wife, when Old Sally would ride in from the range with a new story of uprisings and massacres. "You mustn't listen to such fables, Alice."

But Young Thunder's reference in his funeral oration to a possible attack upon the fort was not to be passed unheeded. Before the young man left the neighbourhood, MacDonald sent for him and had Daniel question him closely. Young Thunder answered with non-committal grunts and, in spite of all Daniel's wiles, remained a block of ignorance and stupidity.

"Ask Mr. Stuart to come here," the Bourgeois said impatiently, and when Charles came in from the store with his cheery "Ho, Boy!" Young Thunder's face lit up and his mind became correspondingly illuminated. He answered every question straightforwardly and to the point.

Yes, Yellow Head himself had said he would take the fort one day. It was his by rights, the Indians said. The white dogs had stolen the land from the Indians. The white dogs had crooked tongues, so the Chief declared. The great White Mother had sold the Indians. Louis Riel was to be their father now. Louis Riel would tell them when they were to rise and take the scalps of the white dogs.

When Young Thunder left with a present from Waby-stig-wan the three men held a long conference. It was finally decided that, if no definite directions had come from Fort Garry by Christmas, MacDonald himself should go down to the Red River to hear the truth and find what the authorities counselled doing.

"I don't think there is really any danger of Yellow Head's becoming troublesome," he said finally. "He and I have been good friends ever since we came here."

To Charles all these disturbing rumours brought every day a more racking anxiety concerning Flora. The thought of MacDonald's going to the Red River brought some comfort, but to wait till after Christmas for relief was quite beyond his power.

It was then that he evolved out of his troubled mind a scheme for setting a guard over Flora, and one that would at the same time take Young Thunder away from the dangers that might beset him.

He rode out with Old Simon and found where his friend was located, and in a few days Young Thunder and his squaw appeared at the fort. Charles laid his plans before him. The rivers and lakes had not yet frozen over. Would he take his canoe and go down the Wawa that ran into the Assiniboine River and thence down to Fort Garry?

Young Thunder, who was a born voyageur with the lust of travel in his veins, eagerly assented. His undying loyalty to Waby-stig-wan was under a great strain as long as his master remained stationary. Charles sketched on a paper the route. It was very simple when he had only to

follow the river, but the map of the Red River Settlement with the house of Chief Factor Murray as its chief object was rather more difficult for Young Thunder to understand. His eyes opened in astonishment at the sight of such a vast number of lodges. Very carefully and patiently Charles explained his plans. Young Thunder was to take a message to the young lady who lived in the lodge with the cross on it; the lady whom they had found on the top of the stockade when they came from the Northland, and who had gone back to the Red River with the carts while they were down at Norway House.

Young Thunder nodded, very proud that he understood. Of course, he knew. She was the beautiful squaw whose hair was like the Golden Rod in the moon of flowers, and who rode her horse as the wind rode across the Lake of the Marshes. He would find her.

Charles enclosed two notes in his long letter to Flora.

Chief Trader Campbell was the man to whom he would have naturally turned for assistance, but Campbell was likely in greater danger than Flora. But the Young Chevalier knew whom he could trust, and one letter was for his old champion Geordie Shaw, who was now her fast friend also, the other was for his old time boatman companion, Louis Richelieu. These two would know how best to use Young Thunder as a guardian for Flora. And having done all he could he sent his messenger away with the first feeling of comfort he had experienced in many days.

On Christmas Eve there arrived at Fort Winnipegosis a visitor who confirmed MacDonald's decision to leave for Fort Garry immediately. Mark Walton was a travelling preacher who came to the fort with his wife about once in two years. They were half-breeds who had been trained in an Anglican Church mission; a simple devout pair, going up and down the land, telling their message of one loving Father to His children in fort, cabin and wigwam.

Mark's wife was the most celebrated singer in Rupert's Land. Her voice was wild and clear and as sweet as the

White Throat's when he carols his spring song to the budding woods. She was famous in every fort in the countryside, and her coming was the signal for every one within riding distance to gather to hear her sing.

"Louis Riel he mak' de beeg troub' on de Red Reevee," Mark announced, when his wife had been taken to Mrs. MacDonald's apartments, and he was seated by the fire in Bachelors' Hall. The officers gathered eagerly about him. Mark had been nearly three months out from Fort Garry, but even before he had left there had been serious disturbances, and the news he had picked up since from runners had been still graver.

The French half-breed population were in rebellion because their country had been transferred from the Company's government to that of Canada without consulting them. Surveyors had been sent out in the summer, and that wild irresponsible youth, Louis Riel, son of the elder Riel, the fiery "Miller of the Seine," had headed a band of Metis and compelled the surveyors to cease operations. Since then Riel had been the virtual ruler of the Settlement. He had taken possession of Fort Garry, where Governor McTavish lay ill. He had defied the new Governor sent out from Canada and held him at bay across the American border. And the latest news was that he had imprisoned a number of the leading citizens of the Settlement who had tried to curb his boundless ambition.

Even MacDonald, slow to credit the rumours with which the country was flooded, was compelled to realise that matters looked serious. Nothing was said to disturb the Christmas festivities for which Mrs. MacDonald had made great preparation, but he quietly made his plans to leave the next day.

At most of the Company's posts Christmas was passed over with little notice, New Year's Day being the great annual festival. But Fort Winnipegosis was unlike every other post in this also that Christmas was duly observed. Early in the morning a service was held in the Indian Hall, to which every one was invited, and this year it was

to be a special occasion with Mark Walton to preach and his wife to sing.

Early on Christmas morning the population of the fort and its surroundings crowded into the Indian Hall and seated themselves on the floor; half-breed servants of the Company, blanketed Indians with their guns, fresh from the hunt; every one, from little Helen May to old Sally who sat together holding each other joyously by the hand. Even the French half-breeds, who were all Romanists and had a superstitious fear of the heretic's religious service, could not resist hearing the heretic's wife sing. The Indians were less rigid and were there in large numbers, chief among them, Simon and Sally. Indeed the old horseguard and his wife never missed a religious service at the fort and took a very liberal view of all denominational differences. They were like the Athenians in being extremely religious and many an altar their poor benighted minds raised to the unknown God. When Father Grouard, who was over Winnipegosis District, came on a visit, Simon and Sally were his most devout converts, and always confessed and received the Sacrament. With equal devotion they performed all the rites of the Anglican Church whenever the Waltons appeared; and there was an itinerant Methodist preacher who occasionally passed through the district and he counted the old couple as the most faithful adherents of his denomination. Moreover, when their tribe came in to the fort with their furs in the spring the two could be seen fleeing on their swiftest horses to the woods with the little bits of red and green braid which they used in the performance of their heathen rites.

Mark Walton read the lesson for the day and led in prayers then gave out a hymn and his wife led the singing. She sat on the floor among the other half-breed women, a slim girlish figure, wearing the short blue dress made of Company cloth and the fringed leggings and moccasins which had almost become a uniform among the half-breed women. The blanket that had slipped back from

her head in the warm room, showed a wealth of bright red hair from a Scottish ancestor, and a dark beautiful face under a Madonna brow.

"Joy to the world, the Lord has come," was the hymn, sung to old Antioch, with its echo of far-off chimes pealed out from church towers on a hundred happy Christmas mornings. And like a chime of bells the half-breed woman's voice caught up the old tune and pealed it forth, every note sweet and clear and silvery. But it was not the pure bell-like quality of her tones that made the heart swell and the eyes grow misty as she sang. Some strange thrilling note, something caught from the lone spaces of the great wild land in which she had been bred, sent a strain of longing and sadness through the most rapturous burst of song; a strain that reached the fountain of tears.

Charles felt a sudden tightening of his throat. Poor young Wallace Leith was struggling with homesick tears and Mrs. MacDonald's fair head, held up among her dark sisters like a lily in a field of sedges, drooped as though an autumn wind had struck it.

The singer led them in hymn after hymn, the Indians sitting entranced and begging like children for more. Then Mark stood up to speak. He was a powerful preacher in French or Cree, his native tongues, but out of deference to Mrs. MacDonald and the officers he gave his message in English this morning and he was not at home.

He spoke haltingly of the great night when the shepherds' vision pierced through the blinding mists of things earthly to the glory that broke through from Heaven on that first Christmas night. He touched lofty heights for a few moments in his childlike simplicity. But he finally wandered away into a lengthy discourse upon shepherds and sheep and into the mysteries of the parable of the sheep and the goats.

"A'm niver seen a goat, me," he confessed, regarding his audience apologetically with his kind, earnest brown eyes, "but I hear it's a much wickeder animal than a sheep."

Charles caught Mrs. MacDonald's eye. Her face was as grave as that of old Sally who was gazing up at him in awe and wonder, but her eyes were dancing and he felt grateful to the preacher for restoring their sparkle.

There was more singing, to which the Indians listened like enchanted children the sweet joyous-sorrowful voice soaring above all others: "O, Happy Day," "In the Sweet Bye and Bye," and finally "Rock of Ages" at Mrs. MacDonald's request, and the service ended.

Presents were distributed to all the servants, and great pans of bannocks, which Bonhomme had been busy preparing all the day before, under Her Majesty's instructions. She had not forgotten the officers, for there was a gift beside the plate of each young man at breakfast. The children had a tree, which Simon had brought in from the woods, and for which Bonhomme had made many little candles with childlike enjoyment.

Then there was a great dinner. Bonhomme had prepared all the delicacies the place afforded; roast duck and muskrat, pickled bears' paws, preserved wild strawberries, and even potatoes. But, greatest of all, there was a real plum pudding, brought in all ablaze on a great platter. Here Bonhomme's skill had failed. There was no French chef could prepare a rabbit or a duck as Bonhomme could, but he was not accustomed to flour and was rather old to learn its uses. The strange fine American flour which the Bourgeois had had shipped from St. Paul for his family was a deep mystery and he could only concoct a sticky and melancholy mess from it. So the lady herself had made the pudding and the gentlemen all arose and drank her health anew when it appeared.

They were making very gay over it when little Hector, who had been eating silently and steadily, paused at last and looked at his plate with a face of despair, his eyes brimming with tears. "Oh, Mamma! I can't eat all my pudding," he wailed in a burst of grief over finding himself inadequate before the great opportunity of his life.

When MacDonald left for Fort Garry the three young

officers in charge of the lone fort set themselves to make the days as bright as possible for "Her Majesty" as Mrs. MacDonald was affectionately called. But for Charles they dragged as slowly as the winter days at Fort Hearne. His heart was away down on the Red River, while his head was sufficiently taxed to meet the difficulties around him.

Not many miles south, the Indians had left their hunting and were gathering about a settlement of Metis who were selling fire-water. Free traders from across the American border had penetrated as far north as the woods of Winnipegosis District, and their liquor was putting the Indians into a dangerous mood. Some of it, Charles found, had come as far as the fort itself and there were drunken rows in the men's houses which he had to settle.

New Year's Day was the one great festivity of the year, and was always ushered in early in the morning, by the servants gathering about the fort and firing a salute.

Charles was awakened at grey dawn by the noise of the guns and by Wallace Leith coming leaping into his room under the conviction that the long-rumoured attack from the Indians had begun.

Charles dressed hurriedly and ran down to receive the guests in the Indian Hall. Carruthers pointed out that there were fewer Indians than at Christmas, and yet there were many more about the vicinity of the fort, for they, too, had begun to leave their hunting. To those who came pipes and tobacco were passed around, hot chocolate and plates of buffalo boss, the latter a great delicacy which Bonhomme had been half the night cooking in great kettles. The visitors ate everything and left with three cheers.

The men were no sooner gone than in came the women and children and now Mrs. MacDonald entered with Hector and Helen May to render assistance. The old women received pipes and tobacco and all the things the men had, and there were plates of wonderful little cakes as well, baked by Her Majesty, which Hector and Helen May passed around with much ceremony and many of which dis-

appeared beneath blankets and shawls to be carried home.

It was an unailing custom that all the women must be kissed on New Year's Day, and old Sally led the procession up to Waby-stig-wan. Carruthers came next, then Harborough. Poor Wallace tried to escape, but his brother officers held him to the task, though when Sally kissed him twice he rightly felt that he had been badly used.

In the afternoon they were invited to Mrs. MacDonald's sitting-room, where Her Majesty served tea. They sat around the fire and talked of home and former New Year's, until little Hector grew tired and ran off to play with his little brown comrades. Helen May climbed upon Doodle-doo's knee and begged for a story, while Harborough read aloud from the latest Edinburgh paper, which was only six months old.

Suddenly the door was flung open and Hector ran in. His face was crimson, his eyes blazing. He strode up to his mother, fairly bursting with rage and grief, but before he could tell his troubles his warrior spirit broke down. He buried his face on his mother's shoulder.

"Oh, Mamma, Mamma!" he sobbed, "Little White Crow, Little White Crow said . . ."

His mother tried to pacify him, but he sobbed on convulsively. At last Wallace Leith, who because of his recklessness was Hector's especial hero, drew the little fellow towards him and whispered that they were all men here together to look after his mother and sister, and that no man must fail, while his father was away. He must stand up like a man, then, and tell what was the matter.

Little Helen May patted his cheek and said "Poo' Hector" gazing at him with eyes full of wondering sympathy. The little man's body stiffened and he gulped out his story, his eyes full of tears and fright.

"Papa's killed!" he faltered. "Little White Crow told me. And Yellow Head's coming with his men, and Big Wind's going to kill Mr. Stuart, and then Yellow Head says he'll take you for his wife!"

Mrs. MacDonald's perfect calm did not desert her.

Only by the sudden paling of her cheek could the young men guess that she was disturbed. She drew the trembling child into her arms.

"Little White Crow has just been trying to draw the long bow," she said soothingly. "We must not heed his idle tales. I am sure Papa is safe, and so are Baby and I with so many, many brave men to take care of us. Why, just think!"—she was smiling now—"I have you, and Mr. Stuart, and Mr. Harborough"—she counted them off on her fingers—"and Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Leith, and Daniel, and Bonhomme, and—oh, such a big army!"

Hector drew a long quivering breath and wiped away his tears manfully on his small handkerchief.

When the little fellow's fears had been assuaged, Charles stepped out to the office and sent for Daniel. Hector, he was well aware, knew more about the Indians and their doings than any one else in the fort, and Little White Crow might be telling a partial truth.

"The dirrt!" Daniel exclaimed. He screwed up his brown face, and spat into the fire. "De Bourgeois not dead," he affirmed. "Yellow Head he pretend so he mak' de mischief. He not come dis mornin'. He tink you no good. A'm know Yellow Head, me myself."

"What had we better do about it?" the worried young Chief asked. Daniel stood looking thoughtfully into the fire, but before he could evolve any plan for meeting the situation, Daniel, Junior, the interpreter's son, stepped into the office.

"Yellow Head come!" he announced briefly. Charles sprang to the window to see the Indian Chief riding in at the fort gate, followed by about twenty of his braves, all mounted and armed.

Daniel darted ahead into the Indian Hall and when Charles entered he found to his surprise that the interpreter had placed a large keg of gunpowder on the table and had torn off the top. He motioned quickly towards the desk. "Write," he commanded.

MacDonald, Charles knew, had the utmost confidence in Daniel. The interpreter knew the furnishings of the

Indian's mind as he knew the interior of his own little shanty, and in this emergency Charles was prepared to obey him implicitly. He turned, slightly puzzled, to the desk, and opening the diary at the page for the day began to inscribe the events of the morning. The thought was uppermost that there might be something very stirring to write before the day closed. The shuffle of moccasined feet made him glance up.

Yellow Head, followed by his braves, came striding into the Hall. The Chief was a tall powerful looking fellow and the men with him were of the same mould. In their blankets and imposing feather head-dresses, with their guns held in readiness and their knives in their belts, their dark faces sullen and forbidding, their eyes gleaming threateningly, they presented an ugly prospect for the young master of the fort. But he nodded casually and went on with his writing, just as he would have done upon any ordinary visit, but his whole being was alive to every slightest movement of Daniel, and before him there leaped a picture of little Helen May in the sitting room beyond, seated on the hearth rug with the firelight playing on her golden curls.

At a sign from the interpreter he stopped, cleaned his quill pen without haste, blotted the page, and, rising, greeted his visitors.

"Ho, Boy!" he said heartily, holding out his hand.

In Rupert's Land it was the unfailing custom for white man and red to meet with a handshake. To have the courtesy refused on either side meant hostility.

Yellow Head scowled and shoved the hand aside. He turned towards Daniel and asked contemptuously for the Bourgeois. Daniel replied that Waby-stig-wan was the master of the fort for the time and all that was in it, and whatever the Chief had to say must be said to him.

Yellow Head responded with an insulting remark about the White Dogs who had crooked tongues. Daniel wisely did not give a complete translation, but when he had finished he added truculently,

"Scare the dirrt, whatefer!"

"Ask them what they want," Charles said quietly. He knew that twenty pairs of eyes, trained to read every gesture and expression, were watching him unwinkingly, and that he must not make one false move.

He knew enough of Cree to gather something of what the Chief was saying. His profanity was mostly French and it was particularly offensive. Daniel interpreted. Yellow Head had found out at last what the White Dogs were doing. They had sold the Indian's lands and his wives to the stranger. The White Dog said he was the Indian's brother, but he lied.

Charles replied through Daniel that whoever told such tales was telling lies. The Great White Mother across the seas was just to her Indian children as she was to her white children. The Indian must not believe the idle tales that his enemies were telling. His lands, his family, and his hunting would be unmolested. The Company would deal fairly as it had always done. If they would wait till Chief Factor MacDonald returned they would see that what he said was true.

Yellow Head did not seem to be mollified. He became abusive. "The White Dog lies," he answered. "MacDonald lies. You are all robbers. The White Dog must get out of the fort to-day, or we will shoot him!"

Daniel repeated the challenge, leaving nothing out this time, and adding swiftly, "Now scare him to deat'!"

Charles did not need a second bidding. Indeed the wily Daniel knew that a verbatim report of the Chief's insulting words would be quite sufficient to rouse Waby-stigwan's hot blood.

"De keg!" he hissed, and for the first time Charles understood the desperate expedient. Its contents were sufficient to blow to pieces everything in Indian Hall.

He whipped out his revolver, and at the same instant there leaped to position a semi-circle of levelled guns. He had a lightning picture of Flora waiting for him at Kildonan, as he thrust the muzzle of his revolver into the gunpowder.

"Tell him," he commanded, "that if I'm to get out of the fort I'll take my visitors with me."

Daniel repeated the challenge with much unction. There followed a death-like silence. Charles held the chief with his eye, his finger on the trigger, waiting for the first hostile move. Then behind the semi-circle of menacing weapons a few braves began to edge quietly towards the door. They were twenty to two, but they reasoned that they were not really in the majority, when one of the enemy was a mad-man with his revolver stuck into a keg of gunpowder.

Yellow Head stood his ground for a few minutes, gazing defiantly at the fatal barrel; but seeing his followers dwindling away one by one, he, too, finally turned and stalked out.

Harborough and Carruthers, who had slipped in behind Daniel and stood armed waiting, came forward with their congratulations. They were very quiet and for once the two seemed quite of one mind; the situation had been ugly enough.

"Her Majesty mustn't know anything about it," warned Charles.

"And don't tell Wally," advised Harborough. "He'd be out all night raising recruits to go out and ravage all the rest of Winnipegosis District. Well, it's certainly been a Happy New Year so far."

"We had an old nurse at home," Charles said, "who always started us off on New Year's morning with, 'Noo, bairnies, whit ye dae on New Year's Day, mind, ye'll dae the hale year through.'"

"Pleasant prospect for you, Stuart," Carruthers said. "But it augurs good success."

"The success is all Daniel's," Charles declared, his hand on the interpreter's shoulder. "Wily old Daniel! You knew it would work."

Daniel smiled and shrugged. "The dirrt!" he remarked, and shuffled away to see if the fort gate was fastened.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The Flight

THOUGH the immediate danger was over, Charles knew it might arise again at any moment. With the help of Harborough and Carruthers he planned a thorough watch of every part of the premises, lest there be enemies within the camp as well as without, and every night he personally looked to the fastening of gates and doors. He had his bed moved into the office where he was near the entrance to Mrs. MacDonald's apartments, and this gave the sagacious Daniel the inspiration for another piece of strategy.

He fetched a large number of gunpowder kegs from the cellar, and placed them under Charles's bed. Then he indulgently allowed his garrulous son, young Daniel, to visit the office and witness the ferocious plans the young Master was making. Feigning great secrecy he led Hector in by another way, and explained how easily Mr. Stuart could blow up an enemy who came near him. Later he graciously permitted Old Sally to be led in by Helen May. Daniel cautioned each visitor to be careful not to let any one know of the Master's plans; and in consequence the news was soon all over the fort and its environs and had penetrated to the farthest Indian encampment of the Greenhill woods, that Waby-stig-wan, who had developed into a fire-eating tyrant in the absence of the Bourgeois, slept in a room so filled with gunpowder that every one was afraid to call him in the morning lest he blow up the fort. There were dark hints of other and deeper plans for the destruction of any one who molested him, plans too terrible to be disclosed.

There was no doubt that any one who valued his life

was wise to stay away from the fort until such time as Waby-stig-wan was himself again, or until the Bourgeois returned.

In spite of all his fortifications, real and imaginary, Charles held an anxious mind. He did not undress at night, but slept lightly with his weapons at hand, like the knights of Branksome Hall who

"Lay down to rest
With corslet laced,
Pillowed on bucklers cold and hard."

The winter passed slowly and tediously. The anniversary of his wondrous arrival at Fort Winnipegosis was approaching and he had had no word of Young Thunder nor his mission to Red River. Flora seemed as far away and unattainable as when he had been at Fort Hearne.

One night, about two months after MacDonald's departure, Charles was dropping into a doze, when he was awakened suddenly by the feeling that some one was near. He was out of his bed instantly and silently. He could hear distinctly a step in the Indian Hall—a step and low voices. He sprang to the door, revolver in hand, to meet Daniel carrying a light and followed by MacDonald.

"Well done!" cried the chief, meeting his armed accountant with outstretched hand. "This place is as hard to enter as O'Grady's castle in Handy Andy!"

Charles could scarcely speak for relief and joy. He took a candle from the mantelpiece and stuck it into the banked-up fire and while Daniel went to the kitchen to find some food, MacDonald gave a hurried account of his adventures.

He had not reached Fort Garry at all. He had journeyed as far as Fort Ellice in the Swan River District. There he found a note from Governor McTavish warning all Hudson's Bay officers to keep away from Fort Garry lest they be imprisoned. The Governor himself was virtually a prisoner. Louis Riel was in command

and the new Governor sent out from Canada had not been permitted to enter the country. The Americans were urging that the new colony join them and unscrupulous men from over the border were urging Riel to fight. There was no help forthcoming from the Canadian Government, the Company was powerless, and if the Metis called upon the Indians to rise the whole country would be in flames!

Charles listened with breath suspended and MacDonald guessed his thoughts.

"They assured us there and at Norway House that so far the Red River settlers were safe. We tried to reach Fort Garry by another route. Halliday joined me at Fort Hampton and we took our dogs down to Norway House, but the same message from the Governor met us there. And yet Chatake Melbourne had been there a week or two earlier and had gone back. Halliday is suspicious of Melbourne. His conduct looks strange to say the least."

The Pelican again! Charles felt his fists clench. He would go down to Red River in the spring if all the half-breeds of Rupert's Land combined to keep him away!

MacDonald listened with a grave face to his account of Yellow Head's hostile visit.

"We must get Alice and the children out of the country just as soon as the carts can leave," he declared. "Man, what a mess this new Government is making of things. They must be all fools at Ottawa!"

The door leading to the family apartments softly opened. Mrs. MacDonald was standing in the doorway, fully dressed, holding aloft a candle that shed its warm light upon her fair hair. Her eyes outshone the light.

"Roderick! I could not rest! I knew you were coming!"

Instantly all the harassed weariness left the man's face as he sprang towards the lighted doorway.

Though the wild rumours of attacks continued for the remainder of the winter, Winnipegosis District remained quiet, and as soon as the snow began to disappear from

the hills and the ice from the streams the Indians began to appear as usual with their furs. But they were few in number and their Chief was conspicuously absent.

Yellow Head's first visit in the spring had always been attended with much ceremony. MacDonald with his staff met the Chief at the gate and conducted him to the Indian Hall. Here a feast was spread out for him and his braves, the pipe of peace was smoked, and Yellow Head received his annual gift of a handsome coat from the Company as a recognition of his rank. But this year there was no friendly visit, and Sally, riding in from the windy range with a baby badger for Hector and Helen May, reported that Yellow Head was mustering his men in the woods above the Greenhill for a very different kind of visit to the fort.

When such reports became persistent MacDonald sent runners to all the other posts of the District, commanding all officers and employees of the Company to come in to Headquarters as soon as their business could be wound up.

"We must concentrate here until we get some instructions from Headquarters," he said to Charles when the last messenger had been despatched. "And that means that I cannot leave. The captain must stay with the ship."

"But what about Her Majesty?"

"I've been wanting to talk the matter over with you, Stuart, but was waiting to see what fate had in store for me. I must send her and the children away as soon as the cart brigade can leave. This is my furlough year, but I cannot leave the Company and the officers depending upon me, as you see. My plan has been to send the furs and the best of the horses straight south to the border, and thence to St. Paul. The prairie is a big place and we will likely escape Riel's eye. But there is only one man in the fort to whom I would entrust the brigade with my family in it."

He looked at his accountant meaningly. It was high praise, the greatest MacDonald could give him, but for

the moment Charles did not comprehend it. He sat staring down at his desk. Not since MacNeill ordered him to the Mackenzie River had he been so stunned. This meant that he could not go to Fort Garry—could not go to Flora in her need!

He glanced up, but the protest on his lips died unspoken. For the first time in these troubled days he saw his Chief as he was: the man who for twenty years had served the Company faithfully, served it through hardships of every sort, cold and starvation and lack of recognition, and yet served it cheerfully, always holding sternly to his duty. He saw him with the lives of scores of white people depending upon him, in danger of his own life, facing without a murmur the possibility of parting with those who were dearer than life itself. Instantly his manhood rose to match his gallant Chieftain, like a soldier springing to attention before his commanding officer.

"It is a great honour, sir," he said. "I'll do my best."

A look of relief flashed over MacDonald's face. He held out his hand.

"I realise all that this means to you, Stuart," he said, "and I hesitated to ask you. But I had no other way to look."

And so fate had decreed the long way round once more.

The family's preparations for the journey were kept a secret as long as possible. Only the usual bustle attending the annual departure of the carts was apparent. The chattering little ones were kept in ignorance of their parents' plans until the last day. It was not well that the Indians should know that the Bourgeois was sending his family out of the country.

Harborough and Carruthers were to help man the brigade, while MacDonald was to keep Wallace Leith to help him; not such a bad bargain as it appeared, for the young apprentice clerk had been much subdued by the real perils of the past winter. As soon as MacDonald could receive his instructions from Headquarters he would

follow the family to St. Paul and take them home to Scotland.

Though their destination had been kept a secret and the report was given out that Mrs. MacDonald was going to visit friends at another fort, Bonhomme seemed to guess that their parting was for long. He padded about after his mistress like a faithful dog and could often be found holding Hector on his knee and weeping over him.

Mrs. MacDonald could not bear the pleading look in his soft brown eyes.

"Oh, Roderick, lad," she said again and again, "whatever happens, don't leave Bonhomme behind!" And often she whispered to Daniel and Wallace Leith, "Be kind to Bonhomme while I'm away."

Sally was another one with whom it was hard to part. She spent the day before their departure at the fort and whenever their proposed journey was mentioned she would catch up little Helen May, kiss her and hold her close as though she could not give her up.

Then Helen May would say, "An' kiss Doodle-doo, Sally," much to Charles's discomfiture, and the old brown woman would make a dash at Waby-stig-wan and salute him soundingly.

The hills were bare of snow and the rolling, wet prairie was smiling over its first glimpse of spring when the brigade set off on its long hazardous journey. There was grave danger that the rebel chief at Fort Garry would try to prevent the Company's goods leaving the country and there was graver danger from the Indians in their unsettled state. But they made a brave showing as they wound down the hills and forded the Greenhill. There were eighteen big-wheeled creaking Red River carts, filled with furs and provisions, followed by a cavalcade of forty prancing steeds from the range, all splendid thoroughbreds which MacDonald felt he must send over the border for safe keeping. There were a dozen or so drivers to manage the carts and horses, besides several trusted half-

breed and Indian servants, some with their wives. Mrs. MacDonald, with little Helen May and Prairie Rose, her Indian maid, the wife of one of the Cree freighters, occupied a cart in the centre of the procession, while her three loyal knights and true, as she named them, rode at her side, all well armed and ready to protect her with their lives. Hector was mounted and rode beside Charles, for the little fellow could stick on the back of anything in the shape of horse-flesh, like the hardy little Indian he was, and he was shouting with delight over the prospect of a long gallop and a visit to a far-off fort.

For the first few miles the three young men spurred ahead, for MacDonald accompanied his wife's cart. He was sending her out into unknown dangers and was turning back into greater danger himself. The present was full of the anguish of parting, the future looked very dark, but these two showed no signs of distress. Mrs. MacDonald sat in the cart, holding little Helen May and speaking in steady tones, and her husband rode by her side smilingly answering his wee daughter's chatter with not a sign of the anxiety and grief that assailed them. But Charles caught the expression of the wife's eyes as her husband drew rein, saying he must go back, and their glance stabbed his heart.

MacDonald halted his party and bade them all good-bye. Hector, eager to be away, could scarcely take the time to lean down from his horse for his father's embrace. The servants, Harborough and Carruthers came next, and then he stood for a few moments bareheaded at the side of the cart where his wife sat. She had been his guide and his mentor, his devoted comrade and helper, for seven years. Many opportunities for a visit home had come to her in those years in the wilds, but she had always put them cheerfully aside. She had never even gone to visit a neighbouring fort except when her husband was compelled to be away. And now they were to part; danger menaced her and duty called him from her side. He stood holding her hand for a few minutes while the others

turned away. Then the word was given to move on and he mounted his horse.

Charles, waiting at the rear for any late command or advice, was the last to say good-bye. MacDonald looked suddenly old and did not sit his horse as straight as usual. The two men shook hands silently.

"I am satisfied that they are under your care," MacDonald said after a moment. He paused, and then continued in his calmest manner. "I don't anticipate trouble, Stuart, but if it should come, you will not let the Indians take Alice, will you?" He glanced at the revolver in the young man's belt.

Charles's heart seemed to miss several beats. His eyes dropped before the look in the other man's.

"You will promise?" asked his chief quietly. The younger man put out his hand again in solemn pledge.

"I promise," he whispered, and wheeling galloped away.

A white handkerchief fluttered from the central cart until the lone horseman and his servant disappeared with a last wave of his cap over the Winnipegosis hills, and the long serpent-like train wound down the valley towards the south.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Doeg, the Edomite

AT the end of a fortnight of fording streams and slow crawling over hill and dale with no adventures, they sighted Fort Hampton situated on the banks of the Assiniboine River. The waters that flowed past the fort joined the Red River away down there to the southeast; Charles fell to day-dreaming as he rode along the bank. Those waters would one day sweep past the big log house beside the coulee, yes, and join the waters of the little stream where perhaps even now Flora had gone out to look for the first orchid. . . .

His dreams were suddenly broken into. A young officer of the Company, riding in from inspecting cattle, came cantering forward to meet the Winnipegosis Brigade. Charles, as chief of the caravan, rode to meet him. It was years since these two had seen each other, but they were years in which their eyes had been trained in the forest and on prairie trails and they recognised each other from afar and spurred forward with joyous shouts. They pitched off their horses and flung themselves each upon the other in a very rapture. Archie's voice was shaking and his eyes moist and Charles's was as near to the breaking point. So, lest they show any of their overflowing love and joy in this unexpected meeting, they called each other abusive names and hammered each other on the back and acted like a pair of foolish school boys instead of a pair of Hudson's Bay Company veterans.

"Old Chevalier! You leathery Cree! Your hair doesn't match your face, man! Why don't you get it dyed mahogany like the rest of you?"

"You beer-barrel! Have you been made a Chief of the Young Dogs that you look so well fed?"

They had not done shaking each other and shouting when Harborough rode up with Mrs. MacDonald, who was mounted that morning, and they had to come down to earth and explain that they were not really fighting, but had gone mad with joy at their unexpected meeting.

Fort Hampton, with Halliday at its head and Archie second in command, was a perfect Delectable Mountains for Charles in the midst of his pilgrimage. Mrs. MacDonald had known the Erskine family at the Red River and Mrs. Halliday was an old acquaintance and gave them all a warm welcome.

Halliday was planning to take his wife and two children down to Norway House just as soon as arrangements could be made to leave. News of the execution by Riel of a young man named Scott had drifted out from Fort Garry and increased greatly the alarm of the Company.

"This country's going to the dogs," Halliday declared. "It's all right for you two fellows," he added, looking rather gloomily at Charles and Archie and the two young clerks from Fort Winnipegosis as, after dinner, they sat smoking in his office.

"You fellows can leave when your five-year contract is up, but it's different with us unfortunate beggars who are tied here."

Charles said nothing, but he realised with a thrill that he too was tied to the country and that he could not leave until he saw Fort Garry and the Red River Settlement again.

"I must be off early to-morrow, Halliday," he cried springing up. "And now for a guide. I've got to get somebody here to show us the way."

"It's impossible to know whom to trust," Halliday said worriedly, as they walked out to the men's quarters. "Every mother's son of these rascally half-breeds is in league with Riel, and he'll be after your horses and furs." He spoke sombrely. All his old gay carelessness had gone from him under his added responsibilities. They crossed the square and a tall Indian, wearing only a loin-cloth and

carrying his gun, came striding through the gate. He stepped swiftly up to Charles, his hand held out, smiled a very broad beaming smile and cried, "Ho, Boy."

"Ho, Boy," Charles responded genially, rather surprised at the man's evident friendliness.

"Hello, Black Cloud," said Halliday. "He seems to be your verra brither, Stuart. What's all the row?"

For the Indian was making a long and elaborate speech, the text of which was Waby-stig-wan, the Feeder of the Hungry, the Father of the Friendless, the Brother of the Sioux in the day of his adversity, and a great deal more that Charles could not follow.

And then suddenly he recognised him. This was Black Cloud, the poor starving chief of the Sioux band, whom he had fed on that far-off spring day, on his way home from Piapot's Creek, where he had visited Johnny McBain in the mud—the poor famished wretch who wondered if gratitude was something to eat! With the Indian's tenacious memory he had recognised his benefactor as soon as he had set eyes on him, and it seemed that his gratitude was as keen as his memory.

Pierre, the half-breed interpreter of the fort, came up at this moment and translated the burden of Black Cloud's address. It was to the effect that Black Cloud was anxious to do his benefactor a service. If the Father of the Friendless and the Feeder of the Hungry required a guide on his journey, Black Cloud knew the south country as the sun knew it, and it would be his highest felicity to go with his friend wherever he desired.

"You surely cast your pemmican on the waters that time, old Chevalier," cried Archie. "You couldn't find a more faithful fellow in all the Swan River district."

Early the next afternoon, when the horses were being hitched to the carts, and with the assistance of Harborough and Carruthers, Charles was seeing that everything was ready for the journey, he noticed a heavy-browed half-breed come out of the fort gate with an Indian attendant.

They jumped upon their horses and rode swiftly down the trail that led to Fort Garry.

"Who's that?" asked Charles suspiciously. Halliday watched the retreating horsemen with a troubled frown.

"He's a Red River breed who arrived here last night from Fort Ellice. His name's Joe La Plante, and I believe he's one of Riel's spies, though one daren't whisper his suspicions."

"Joe La Plante!" For an instant Charles was strongly tempted to spring upon his horse and ride after the fellow. It would be good to get his hands on him just for his part in slandering Marie Rose.

"I'm sorry he saw you people here," Halliday continued. "Pierre doesn't trust him."

"Doeg, the Edomite!" cried Charles. "I know him and his master, the Pelican. He'll do all the mischief possible."

The young leader of the expedition was not a little disturbed. MacDonald had warned him that the fact that valuable furs and horses were leaving the country to be sold for the Company was to be kept a secret, and now Riel would surely know and, worse still, Melbourne. With Black Cloud for a guide he could choose the unfrequented trails and so be likely to escape, but the shadow of Joe La Plante and the Pelican followed, and the realisation of the disturbed conditions at Red River lay heavily on his heart.

But he showed nothing of his anxiety as he and Halliday helped Her Majesty into the saddle and saw that little Hector was well mounted and Helen May comfortable in the arms of the maid. Archie rode with them far down the trail. The two old friends said farewell, not knowing when or where they might meet again. But they had had time to tell all the wonderful story of their lives since their separation. Archie had a half-dozen romantic love-stories to confide against Charles's one, but he was willing to confess that the one surpassed all his own experiences.

As of old they laid radiant plans for the future. They

were not so sure, now, that they would each be a Chief Factor one day and return with boundless wealth to St. Andrew's, but they were still young and could afford to dream.

And so, with Black Cloud mounted beside him, and Harborough making jokes about their being led to the promised land by a pillar of cloud, Charles rode away at the head of his slow-moving column far to the southward into the heart of the level prairie.

Day after day they journeyed with the spring breezes from the south coming up warm and welcoming, camping each night a little nearer the American border beyond which they would be safe from the rebel forces. And as they journeyed, growing each day more hopeful of escape, there came riding out swiftly from Fort Garry a troop of horsemen despatched by the rebel president to intercept the Winnipegosis Brigade and bring them prisoners to Fort Garry.

Doeg, the Edomite had arrived.

CHAPTER XXXV

Rebellion

FLORA CARMICHAEL went slowly down the creaking stair in obedience to her uncle's summons. Walter Melbourne had been in close conference with him all morning and had just departed. She felt, with a prophetic sinking of her heart, that the crisis she had been dreading all winter was upon her.

Life had been full of terrors in the past months along the Red River. A half-breed rebel sat in the Governor's seat at Fort Garry. Many of the leading citizens of the community had been thrown into prison, and one had been shot for offending the new autocrat, while Governor McTavish lay ill in the fort at his mercy.

In passing from the rule of the Hudson's Bay Company to the control of the Canadian Government, the unfortunate little colony had fallen between two stools, and was now the victim of anarchy and in grave danger of an Indian uprising. The Kildonan settlement looked on in amazed horror at the outrages of the rebels, but no one felt capable of leading the loyalists against them, while the strong, faithful loyalty of the English and Orcadian half-breeds alone averted disaster.

To Flora the winter had been especially trying. She was more alone than she had ever been since the day her young father and mother left her an orphan in the forest of Upper Canada. For since her visit to Fort Winnipeg her relations with her uncle had been strained to the breaking point. The old man had forbidden the name of Charles Stuart to be mentioned in his presence, and had commanded Flora to forget him.

Flora had responded with spirit that she would marry

Charles Stuart when he came down with the brigade in the spring, and from that day life in the square log house by the Red River was as turbulent as it was in Fort Garry.

A common danger overshadowed for a time their domestic troubles, and drew the girl and her guardian together again. Flora strove to be kind and obedient in all things save one. She attended assiduously to her household tasks, looked carefully to her uncle's comfort, and learned again the hard lesson of waiting. With the hopefulness of youth she was sure it would all be well yet. Her Prince would come in the spring with the brigade. She said this over to herself every night, praying fervently that it might be so, and repeating it again in the morning to help her face the trials of a new day.

She had need of all her high courage and faith. For often even her dauntless spirit was put severely to the test. A greater danger than Riel and all his rebel followers menaced her. The Pelican and his influence over her uncle had become a real problem.

Since the last Council meeting at Norway House, Mr. Melbourne had quietly resigned from the Company's service. His reasons for leaving, like his movements since, were all shrouded in mystery. He lived in state in a fine house down near the Lower Fort and came and went among his friends as usual.

There was not the slightest doubt in Flora's mind that he was in league with the rebels. His fierce enmity against Governor McTavish and his French and Indian blood were enough to put him on the side of Riel. Moreover, the heavy-browed half-breed boatman, named Joe La Plante, who all winter had ridden about the settlement on his red-blanketed horse as one of Riel's scouts, was also Melbourne's trusted benchman. She did not for a moment doubt her uncle's loyalty, but she knew that Melbourne was deceiving him, and dreaded the consequence.

But Mr. Chatake played his game so well that few of the loyalists suspected him. Kildonan was their rendezvous and Melbourne came and went between the

Settlement and the Lower Fort, always busy, always kind and courteous. Chief Factor Murray trusted him implicitly, and Flora dared not voice her suspicions. He continued to come to the house as usual, in spite of the cold and distant bearing of its young mistress, and she was forced to admit that their comparative tranquillity in the midst of the turmoil and alarms of the Settlement was due to Melbourne's kind attentions.

There had been one glorious day in the midst of the winter's darkness. It was the day Young Thunder, with his squaw and his dog-train, arrived with her precious letter. It seemed as though Charles had reached over the miles of wilderness that divided them to protect her, and they were happy tears that fell upon his letter.

Young Thunder hung about the Settlement, under the protection of old Geordie, and the endless winter passed at last without his help being needed. By the time the first scouts of the great northbound army of wild fowl came shouting up the Red River, the settlers had begun to breathe freely once more. Rumours of troops being sent out from Canada gave new life. A revulsion of feeling against the rebel President had swept over the settlement upon the execution of Scott, and there were potent signs that soon the lawful Government would at last assert itself.

And now spring was really here, and to Flora that meant one thing: Charles would be on his way with the brigade. Surely he would come—provided the country was not in the throes of an uprising. He would come and then everything would be made right.

And then, in this comparative calm and relief from anxiety, she was possessed with a strange premonition of danger. She went very slowly down the stairs and into her uncle's room where he sat at his desk. It was a brilliant spring day, cold and bright and windy, and the sunlight streamed in at the square windows, flooding the room and lighting up the girl's hair as she seated herself in its warm beams.

Old Chief Factor Murray, turning from his desk

towards her, was struck with her beauty as she sat in the sunshine. She was pale this winter from the confinement which the unsettled conditions had made necessary for the women, and the sparkle of her eye had been replaced by a look of gentle appeal, but there was something more lovely than usual in her face. The old man saw it, and Melbourne's plan for getting her away before her lover was captured seemed less agreeable than it had during the morning's conversation.

"Flora," he said, more gently than usual, "the time has come when it is possible for us to leave here for a while at least." He shot a glance at her from underneath his bushy brows. "You must have realised for some time that you are not safe here."

Flora regarded him with widening eyes. "But where could we go, Uncle Malcolm? Are the Erskines and the Blacks going, too? Surely it isn't necessary now."

It was plain that the old man was not at his ease under her wondering gaze. He frowned.

"It is surely enough that I tell you it is necessary," he answered coldly. "You must allow me to be the judge sometimes. We are going by boat to Norway House, and if the brigade goes down to York Factory we shall go home. I am weary of all this strife."

Flora, seated on the home-made sofa opposite him, suddenly straightened herself as though she had received a blow. Leave now, when Charles must be on his way to her! What if he came and found her gone!

"But," she stammered, trying to gain time to collect her thoughts, "but, Uncle Malcolm, I thought everything had been improving lately. Mr. Black said last Sunday . . ."

"It is what I say, not what Mr. Black or any one else says, that must be your guide at present," he interrupted with his old sternness. "I have information that makes my opinion slightly more valuable than any chance one you may pick up. The first boats are leaving the Lower Fort on Wednesday. You have two days to prepare. Ross

is sending his family, and Mr. Melbourne has been kind enough to promise to convoy us safely."

Flora gave a sharp exclamation, but her uncle silenced her with uplifted hand.

"I know well what you are going to say. You have always been rebellious, have always persisted in going against me in this matter. If you had obeyed me you would have been Walter's wife, and all this trouble and anxiety would have been saved me. But you shall obey me this time. We shall leave here Wednesday morning. Flemmand and Frances will remain in the house till our further plans are perfected. I shall get a maid for you at Norway House if we decide to return home."

The sparkle had returned to Flora's eyes, the colour to her cheek; the flag of rebellion was being hoisted.

"I cannot possibly do as you ask, Uncle Malcolm," she said steadily. "We have plenty of friends here who will take care of me. It is impossible for me to go anywhere under Mr. Melbourne's protection, and if you would listen to all I could tell you about him you would be the last to suggest your niece's putting herself into such a humiliating position."

For a moment the old man sat and stared at her in speechless amazement and anger. She had openly defied him in the matter of her engagement to Charles Stuart, but he had not dreamed she would dare again.

He began to bluster. "Do you mean to say," he cried, hitting the desk with his fist, "that you have so little sense that you do not recognise the danger we are in? There may be a Cree uprising any day, and when you are carried off by some big black buck you may wish then you had listened to reason."

"You cannot frighten me with threats, Uncle Malcolm," she said coldly, her courage rising with her anger. "And I would rather be carried off and scalped than accept favour from a man with the character of Walter Melbourne. He is in league with Riel; I know it!"

She shot out the accusation at a venture, and was

shocked to see how she had hit the mark. Her uncle's face grew white. He glanced about the room as if in fear that she had been overheard.

"You lie!" he hissed. "You have been listening to the slanders made up by those precious friends of yours at Winnipegosis. You watch your tongue, my lady, or you may find yourself behind prison bars! And do you suppose I don't know why you are so reluctant to leave?" he demanded, his voice rising with his fury. "Do you think I am a fool or blind that I do not know why you are waiting? For a flunkie who prefers one of your despised half-breeds to yourself!"

Flora came to her feet like a taut bow springing straight when the arrow is shot.

"Uncle Murray," she said, looking down on him, white and cold and very quiet. "You know that you are merely repeating the lies your friend, Walter Melbourne, paid his half-breed servant to invent."

The old man rose and stepped towards her menacingly. The girl did not move, but waited facing him, her head held high. She was quite as tall as he, and her eyes were on a level with his as he approached, his hand upraised. She stood there very slim and fragile, but the picture of gallant defiance, her eyes never wavering.

Murray hated the sight of fear or cowardice, it stirred all the latent cruelty in his nature. If she had cringed he might have struck her, but her very boldness saved her. In spite of himself there arose in the man's heart a fierce pride in her. She was of his own blood, and she had his courage. He had never met her like among his womankind before, and his old warrior heart acknowledged that she was of his kind. His arm dropped, but his rage against her did not die; it was only baffled.

He uttered an ugly insinuation regarding Marie Rose that set her eyes blazing in her white face. "It is false!" she burst forth. "Charles Stuart is above reproach. All your contemptible slander cannot touch him. And, listen to me, Uncle Murray!" She stopped him with an im-

perious gesture of her hand, her discretion all gone. "I am not one of your meek, half-breed daughters, and I will not be handed about to whomsoever you please. When I marry it shall be to the man of my own choice. And I'd rather be the wife of the meanest half-breed servant in the farthest-off post of the Barren Lands than rule Rupert's Land with a man of the character you have picked out for me!" The old man's eyes burned red. He strode to the door and flung it open violently. His voice was sunk to a furious whisper.

"Go to your room. Get your things ready. If you disobey me this time, you leave my house—to-night—never to enter it again!"

Flora turned, and, with dignity, left the room. She almost stumbled over old Frances, who was weeping on the bottom step of the stairs.

"Oh, Mees Flora, Mees Flora," she sobbed. "De Bourgeois, he not mean dat beeg talk. He not mean heem." She patted the girl's arm, clinging to her and pouring out French endearments.

The love of the old serving woman came nearer to breaking down Flora's courage than all her uncle's rage.

"Don't, don't, Frances, dear," she whispered, putting her arms around the old woman's neck and turning comforter. "Don't cry for me. I shall be taken care of."

She went up the stairs, walking very steadily as long as the woman's eyes were on her, but she stumbled blindly when she entered her room. She closed the door and stood staring out of the window. She did not move until she heard the front door slam and saw her uncle ride past in the direction of the Lower Fort.

Her heart was stung to the quick. She loved him. He had been kind, had given her a home, and been a father to her, and now he had turned her out. For she would not go to Norway House with Walter Melbourne, not though she were to die here alone.

An added terror came to her in the thought that her uncle might be right in his predictions. Melbourne knew

the rebel plans, and he might be aware of a coming catastrophe. Oh, if her Prince could only come to her now!

She stared out of the little window over the level prairie, sun-bathed and wind-swept. There might be hostile bands of Indians or Metis hidden in every bluff, and yet she must venture out alone, that very hour. But where should she go! To Mrs. Black? That would bring down the wrath of her uncle upon the minister's head. She thought of the many friends who would willingly give her shelter, but pride made her hesitate.

And then her young eyes, wide with fear, looked up the trail that led to Fort Garry, and saw a figure approaching that seemed in her extremity an angelic presence sent in answer to prayer. It was a little, old brown man, coming down the trail at the easy trot of one accustomed to run beside a dog-team. Old Geordie Shaw! He would help her! Geordie and Young Thunder would take her to Mr. Black, and he would tell her what to do.

Flora and old Geordie were friends of long standing. When Archie Sinclair left Fort Garry he had confided to the old man that the Young Chevalier was particularly interested in Miss Carmichael, niece of old Retired Factor Murray. From that day old Geordie became her staunch friend, waiting for a word with her at the church door, or stopping at her home with a fine fish or a pair of wavies. He was always making errands for himself down to the Chief Factor Murray's, where Flora found some way of employing him at light tasks with heavy pay, so that he wanted neither tea nor tobacco; and many a bannock found its way from Frances's pantry to old Geordie's shanty.

Since the upheaval at Fort Garry, and the establishment of the rebel government, old Geordie, indignant for the rights of the Company, had taken up his abode in a cabin on the edge of the little village of Winnipeg, which was growing up about the walls of Fort Garry. Here he kept a watchful eye on the usurpers, like a faithful dog who sees his master's seat taken by a stranger. Thither Flora had sent Young Thunder, and the Chipewyan and

the old Scot had formed a sort of bodyguard that gave her a feeling of security.

She was flinging her clothes into a bag when the old man's knock sounded through the silent house.

He had come to the front door, as usual, and, as usual, Flemmand was indignantly demanding that he go round to the rear. Flemmand knew what was correct, and argued that old Geordie was a servant; but the old watchdog of Fort Garry had been so long in the Company's service that he considered himself as much an officer as Governor McTavish. There was a long altercation in broad Scots and Cree-French, with many "Saprees" and "Diables" on the part of the defence and profane denunciations of "the bit buddie's collie shankie" from the attacking party.

Geordie prevailed just when Flora was about to interfere, and was ushered in by the reluctant servant. She ran down the stairs to find the old man standing in the drawing-room door. His little brown face, covered with wispy grey whiskers, his bright, alert eyes looking out from them, made him more dog-like than usual.

"It's a message from himsel'," he growled. Flora closed the door swiftly and stood before him, every muscle tense.

"Is he—is the brigade here?" she whispered.

Old Geordie shot out a sarcastic "Huh! The cairts? D'ye think MacDonald's sic a like fule as to drive into the diel's mooth then? Hoots!"

"What then? What is it? Have you a letter? Oh, Geordie, tell me, and tell me quick!" She caught hold of the sleeve of his capote and shook him.

With maddening deliberation old Geordie explained. "The cratur," as he called Young Thunder, had been hanging about the fort with Louis Richelieu and had seen Joe La Plante arrive. Louis had hidden behind a bale of tobacco in the packing-room and heard Joe tell Melbourne that the Winnipegosis Brigade, under the command of Mr. Stuart, had reached Fort Hampton on its way to the States, with MacDonald's wife and family and

forty of the best breed horses, and carts full of valuable furs. And Riel was going to send out a body of horsemen to intercept them and bring them all prisoners to Fort Garry.

Flora held her breath and stared white-faced at the old man. If Melbourne got Charles into his power! He might share the fate of poor Thomas Scott!

"Are you sure of this, Geordie?" she whispered. The old man shifted his tobacco from one cheek to the other and gave her his sidelong glance.

"Oh, no," he said with heavy sarcasm. "It's a' lees Ah jist made up!"

Flora had a hysterical desire for laughter, but checked it sternly, knowing that she would burst into tears the next moment.

"And can't we stop them? Can't we do anything? Oh, surely Governor McTavish won't—"

Something like sympathy crept into old Geordie's guarded countenance. "The cratur's no sae slow," he declared. "He's leavin' the night, tae warn them, jist as soon's it's dark—him an' his squaw. Louis'll gang wi' him. He was aye the lad for Maister Stuart, Louis was, an' he kens a' their traps like a wolverine."

Flora's drooping head came up suddenly, her eyes shining so that old Geordie stared at her, alarm mingled with his admiration.

"I'm going, too! Tell Young Thunder! I'll ride Pelly Noir, and I'll meet him and Lightfoot in the coulee as soon as it is dark."

Old Geordie gaped at her open-mouthed, then whispered, half pityingly, "Losh, the lassie's daft!"

Flora laughed. Her courage had all come back. She was ready to dare anything. She flung the door open. "I'm going," she whispered, whirling round upon him. "Tell him I'll be ready at dark! In the coulee!" And she fairly soared to the top of the stair.

Old Geordie remained standing in the centre of the room. He stared, unseeing, at Frances, who was beckon-

ing him towards the kitchen, where a mug of tea and a plate of bannocks were set out upon the table. Then he seemed to come to life. He drew a great breath.

"Eh, yon's a leddy!" he exploded.

And so it transpired, when night came down upon the Red River, while Chief Factor Murray was returning from the Lower Fort, and long ere Joe La Plante had begun to muster his men, that five riders stole away, one by one, towards the north, and, skirting the settlement to avoid sentries, galloped swiftly into the heart of the westward prairie.

There was one white man; a small, shrivelled figure, who, nevertheless, sat his horse as only an experienced buffalo hunter could. There was a short, thick-set half-breed, and a stalwart Indian. And behind them rode two women; squaws to all outward appearance of blankets, moccasins and buckskin skirts. But one of the squaws sat her horse strangely erect, and under the shawl that covered her head her hair shone like pale gold in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Over the Border

IT had been a long anxious day for the young man heading the Winnipegosis cart brigade across the prairie. He calculated that they must be about due west of Fort Garry and that if an enemy had been sent out to intercept them their trails must soon cross. As ill luck would have it, too, they had been for three days crossing a plain as level as a mill pond. On its great flat expanse objects stood out startlingly clear. A couple of stray buffalo or a single Indian horseman could be descried at an incredible distance, and it seemed as if the long black serpent of creaking carts with its following of prancing steeds might be viewed from Fort Garry. They fairly shouted their presence to the farthest horizon. The trails were muddy and slippery, and clouds of maddening flies and mosquitoes clung to them and made the days miserable and the nights agonising.

Then Black Cloud, who had so far led them as unerringly as the wild gander heads his flock straight to their southern home, had for the first time shown signs of hesitation. For almost a week they had been passing through a strip of country which a few years before had been swept by prairie fires, and the bluffs and river courses presented a picture which the Sioux guide could not match with the faultless map of his memory.

So far the journey had been providentially uneventful. They had passed Indian encampments, and an occasional hut of a Metis hunter. At such times Charles had kept Mrs. MacDonald and the children concealed. He had not even dared allow them the luxury of a covered cart lest some one notice and pass the word along. So no one had

marked anything unusual in the familiar sight of the Company's outfit.

The weather was ideal too, in spite of the mosquitoes, now that spring had fully come. The prairie air blew soft and fresh like the breath of the sea, from endless clean-swept miles of lush grass and spring blossoms. The bluffs along the streams showed pink buds, where the water ran high and fresh.

Mrs. MacDonald had been in the saddle all morning, riding between Carruthers and Harborough, with Hector frisking ahead. She was back in the cart with her children now, and Charles rode by her side, as he often did, to lighten the journey with his gay prophecies of all they would do when they reached St. Paul and her husband joined them.

Hector and Helen May had wonderful news. Prairie Rose, their mother's Indian maid, and wife of one of the freighters, had remained behind for a half-hour or so that morning, and Mrs. MacDonald had sent her husband back to look after her. The slow-moving carts had creaked on but a short distance when the pair came galloping up on their ponies, and from the hood made by Prairie Rose's blanket there protruded a wee brown head! The children were clamorous with wonder and delight. Were there brown dollies like that one to be found in every coulee, was the burning question. And wouldn't Doodle-doo please stop at the next bluff and let them hunt for one.

"Nenny-May wanta fin' a baby too," pleaded the little girl, her bright eyes watching every badger hole expectantly.

"When we stop for the night," Doodle-doo promised, "you and I shall hunt in the woods and see if the fairies have left anything for us too. If we don't find a real baby we might find a baby bird and that would be almost as good."

It was a great relief when, in the afternoon, the level line of the horizon to the south was broken by a low range of rolling hills. By evening they were approaching a

high line of woods that promised a splendid shelter for the night. Helen May churned up and down with joyous expectation.

"De fayies hab somepin' up dare," she announced mysteriously.

Slowly, with much patient straining of the ponies and impatient urging of their drivers, the carts climbed the slope, and just as the sun was throwing a mantle of gold over the great grassy sea behind, they halted on the rim of a saucer-like valley. Black Cloud had ridden ahead, as usual, and had chosen an ideal camping ground in a grove of poplar and elm.

While the men unhitched the carts and prepared supper, and Mrs. MacDonald and the children gathered admiringly around Prairie Rose where she sat proudly under a tree, her baby in her arms, Charles rode out ahead with Black Cloud to survey the land, giving orders before he left that there must be no fire for cooking supper and that they must eat their dried meat and pemmican washed down with cold river water.

They rode up to the summit of the hill upon which they were camped and came out on a wooden height that was like the peak of a great roof. From their feet the vast rolling country fell away, terrace below terrace, like a giant staircase, down to the level floor of a valley where the thread of a river twisted and turned, shining gold in the sunset. From the purpling woods behind them the White Throat and the Veery led the anthem of evening, while out on the bright slopes where the sunlight still fell the prairie Lark and the Bobolink called back their part of the antiphonal chorus.

Black Cloud gave one sweeping glance from east to west, and his face cleared. He brought his long yellow forefinger down upon the palm of his left hand pointing southwest. He had found the trail again; the maps tallied.

"March, boy!" he cried triumphantly.

Charles nodded smiling. "March to-morrow, early." He was about to turn his horse when suddenly Black Cloud

made the swift gesture that denoted danger. His long finger pointed to the east. Looking keenly Charles could see nothing for some moments; then there gradually grew upon his vision, far to eastward where the trail followed the opposite bank of the thread-like river, a moving black speck.

"Buffalo?" he asked. Black Cloud shook his head. He put two fingers astride another. Charles nodded. It signified a man riding a horse. The guide looked again and made the sign, three, four, five times!

Five! If they were the advance scouts of the enemy, they must prepare to receive them. Charles rode swiftly back and gave Harborough the news, with orders to set the carts in a circle and prepare for an attack. Then, taking Carruthers, and with a word of reassurance to Her Majesty, he returned hurriedly to the outlook.

Dismounted and completely screened by underbrush, they peered out.

"White man," Black Cloud announced, before the others could do more than count the number approaching.

The five horsemen were in full view now, galloping swiftly up the river. At a point almost opposite the on-lookers they forded the stream and began to ascend the terraces heading directly for the camp.

Slowly they came up the long slopes, barred by the sun's level rays. The nearer they approached the more convinced Charles became that they were the scouts of the expected enemy. They showed every sign of a long and hurried journey, and it was very evident that they were searching for something. They were eagerly scanning the country about them, north, south and west.

At the foot of the slope where the spies lay hidden four of the party halted, while one climbed the hill to reconnoitre. Plans for capturing the whole band were racing swiftly through Charles's head and he was about to turn and race back to the camp for reinforcements when Black Cloud arrested him.

"Squaws," he said, holding up two fingers; then, "White squaw."

Charles halted wonderingly. If there was a white woman in the party, or a woman of any kind it was very unlikely they were rebel scouts. The man climbing the slope was an Indian, he gazed keenly at him. There seemed something strangely familiar in the outline. The white woman down there, too, sitting her horse beside the white man. . . .

The wide golden prairie began to whirl about him. The mounted figures danced in a rosy mist. He was dreaming! He was going mad! He gave a shout and Carruthers clutched his arm in terror. And then his insanity overcame him and the next moment he had broken from cover and was tearing down the slope, waving his cap and yelling.

His madness seemed to be contagious. He had leaped only a few yards down the hill when the white squaw gave an answering cry and sprang from her horse. She came up the slope to meet him like the wind. Her blanket had been flung aside and her hair shone like gold in the sun. And, though there were amazed eyes watching them from both sides they ran into each other's arms.

From the first glimpse Charles had had of Flora in the Kildonan coulee she had always seemed more of a phantom of delight than anything really human. And now this marvellous appearance where, in his wildest dreams, he could not have hoped to meet her left him too astounded for speech. And while he could not ask her any questions neither could she explain. She could only cling to him, laughing and crying. And then old Geordie and Louis rode up with Young Thunder and the miracle was made clear.

"I knew we'd find you," Flora declared later, when they had achieved a comparative calm. She sat on the ground in the centre of the circle of carts, one arm around Alice and the other around Hector, and with Charles holding little Helen May on his knee, sitting still dumb before her.

"I felt we'd be guided to you, somehow," she repeated, with the assurance of youth that forbids any fear that its plans may go astray.

Hector looked up at her, his eyes dancing. "Mr. Stuart knew you were coming," he announced.

"Ess, Doodle-doo tole us 'bout it," added Helen May. Their elders looked at them in wonder.

"Told you about Flora's coming, darlings?" asked their mother.

"Yes," declared the little man. "He told us we'd find somethin' lovely on this hill when we got here."

"I t'ought it was a dolly," Helen May supplemented. "But I yike oo far better. Don't oo, Doodle-doo?"

"But, Flora, child," Alice cried when they had all laughed rather shakily. "To think of your daring to take such a ride! Even with the protection you had."

"It was the most gallantly courageous thing I ever heard," Charles whispered, his eyes shining.

"Courageous!" she laughed. "It was sheer terror and cowardice that drove me to it. I—I had to come." And sitting in the gathering purple of the twilight she told them of the proposed trip and her headlong flight.

When Alice went to put the little ones into their cart bed the lovers sat whispering in the mellow dusk.

"The last time I asked you to take me with you, you refused me," Flora declared gleefully. "But now you can't. You're simply driven to it!"

And Charles, who had so long been driven by fate and duty where love could not follow, drew a great sigh of contentment.

"Yes, thank the Lord, I'm simply driven to it!" he exclaimed reverently.

The astute Louis had the whereabouts of the enemy fairly well located according to the most careful calculations. He gave it as his opinion that they would be down upon them in a very few days unless they hurried forward.

Black Cloud counselled waiting. If the enemy crossed their trail they would soon follow them down. The better

plan was to fortify their position here and hope that the rebels would pass south of them. So the brigade camped in the shelter of the grove with scouts placed in the bluffs overlooking the valley.

In a few days Black Cloud came in with the joyful news that an armed party had been sighted on the skyline riding swiftly past far to the south. The next morning the brigade hurried forward. They crossed the enemy's trail and Black Cloud, who read the plain as one reads the printed page, counted the number of their horses from their tracks—twenty of them.

"Twenty! That would have made a bit of a collie shankie, Geordie, man!" Charles cried, riding up with Louis on one side and Young Thunder on the other. He looked at the four who had done him such great service.

"I wonder," he exclaimed, "if ever a fellow had such friends in the world before!"

He stared at them with something of reverence in his heart. Commonplace men they were: a gnarled old Scot, a French half-breed, and two Indians—all simple, unlettered men. And yet in Charles's eyes they had taken on something of the shining semblance of the angels which his mother had promised would have charge over him.

And so Flora and the Prince rode away over the border into exile, but little cared they where they rode so long as they went together. There were dangers still lurking on every side, but the supreme danger that they might be parted had been removed and nothing else mattered. And as Pelly Noir pranced away the next morning over the grassy lawns of the prairie his rider beguiled the way, with a gay carol:

"O, Brignal Banks are fair to see,
And Greta Woods are green,
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English Queen!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

Back to Red River

ONE August morning, while the rebel President sat at his breakfast in Fort Garry, there rang out over the Red River plains the thrilling song of a bugle. The soldiers had come! Over an incredibly difficult trail they had toiled; miles of wilderness, of forest and lake, rock and hill, rapid and portage; a gallant column not to be stayed by the most gigantic obstacles. They had come; and the clank of their arms and the tramp of their marching feet were like a strain of sweetest music to the ears of the harassed and weary settlers. At the first note of the bugle the rebels fled, and once more peace and law reigned on the Red River.

Walter Melbourne deemed it wise to disappear over the border at this time, leaving behind an old man, broken and ashamed at the ignominious part he had almost been led to play.

Chief Factor MacDonald carried the news of these great changes when, relieved from all anxiety, he joined his family at St. Paul's.

"And where are you going for your wedding trip?" he asked, looking across the hotel table at the bride and groom. "The whole world is before you. Will you go to Canada, or back to Winnipegosis, or will ye gang tae bonny Scotland with us? Her Majesty ought to have a Prince and Princess in her retinue."

The Princess looked across the table at Her Majesty with loving eyes.

"I've never seen Scotland—not even St. Andrew's. It would be glorious. But we must go back to Kildonan first, mustn't we?" she asked turning to her husband.

"He who has once drunk of the waters of the Red River," quoted Charles; but Flora shook her head. It was the waters of filial love and duty she was returning to drink.

"I must go to Uncle Malcolm," she said softly. "He needs me."

And so they went back together to the coulee where they had first met, went back at the call of love and duty, all unconscious that they rode at the head of a vast procession that even now had turned its face westward and was soon to fill the solitudes that echoed to the rumbling of their lone Red River carts. A great advancing host was to follow in their train; a multitude whose tramp the poet's ear had caught when his dilated sight first took in the encircling vastness.

"Life is very much like the Red River," Flora said one evening, as they sat in a poplar grove at sunset and watched the waters slip by, molten gold in the glow of the setting sun towards which it was running instead of their true course towards the north star.

"It never runs just the way you expect, but is full of such surprising twists and turns."

"But it reaches Lake Winnipeg in its own good time," said Charles stretched in a vast content upon the grass at her feet.

"And it has flowers along the banks and bluffs for the birds to build their nests, even though it has some dangerous rapids."

"And it is held in carefully by its banks, so that it cannot run out of the course appointed to it."

Flora mused for a while. "I wonder if the banks that I fretted against were after all just as useful. The Red River does a lot of damage when it overflows its banks. Remember the marks of the Great Flood on the Church walls? I wonder if I hadn't run away, but had waited until you came. . . ."

But Charles could not be persuaded that her coming to him had been anything but right and good.

"How could I have ever reached my Lake Winnipeg if my Guardian Angel hadn't come to my rescue?" he asked.

They were silent for a time, too happy for speech. The river of their life was flowing very smoothly just then. Charles looked dreamily down the golden flood of the Red River.

His Guardian Angel! The name raised a flood of tender thoughts. His river of life had been kept in its proper course by ministering spirits, when its headlong flood would have plunged into reckless byways. They had always stood on guard as his mother had promised.

He had a wondrous vision of them for the first time: a long shining procession, from poor little Marie Rose, and Oskinique in his grave by the Greenhill, to Young Thunder sitting down there by the water's edge smoking his evening pipe. He saw them in their true light; the Minister of Kildonan, old Geordie and Louis, Black Cloud, Fraser, far away in his northern post, Her Majesty and a dozen more. He was held in awe by the wondrous power of love and friendship to overrule hate and evil. He turned and looked into the loving eyes of his Guardian Angel and in the golden glow of the Red River he saw his mother smile.

THE END

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